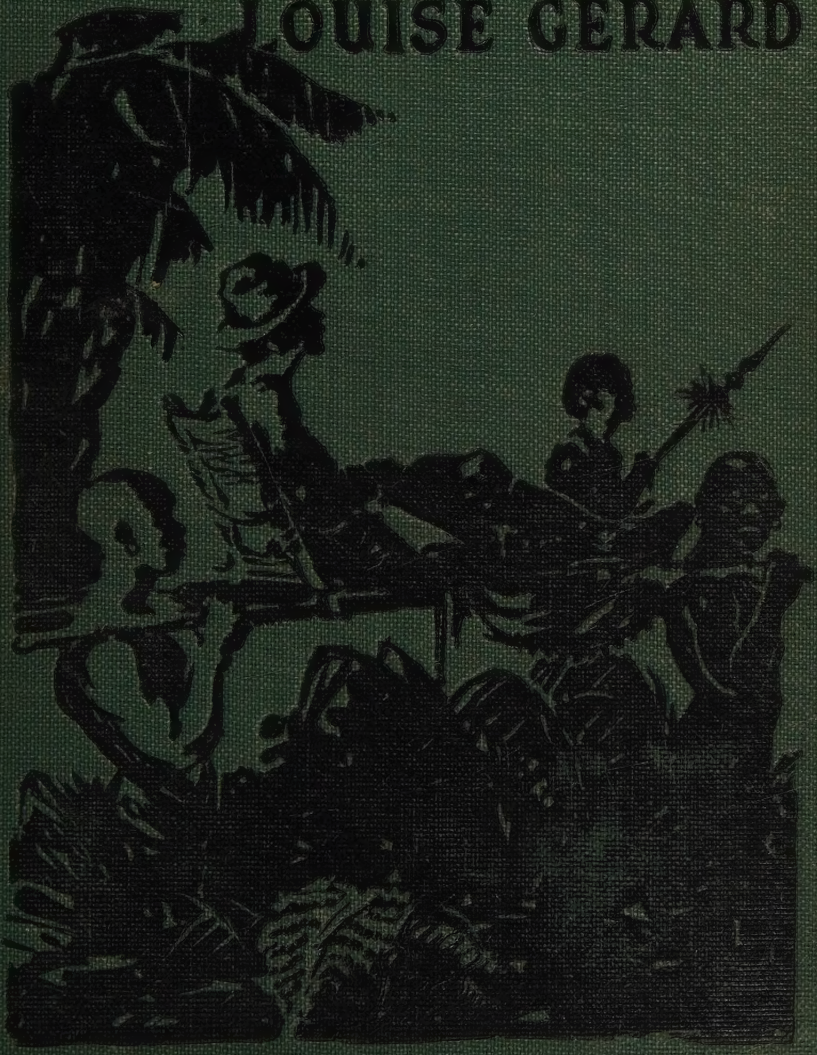
JUNGLE LOVE

LOUISE GERARD



JUNGLE LOVE

By the Same Author

A Son of the Sahara
The Woman He Desired
A Wreath of Stars

Unable to face life with her burden of shame and folly, she hurried on, knowing that, in the trackless expanse, death could be found.

JUNGLE LOVE

BY

LOUISE GERARD

AUTHOR OF "A SON OF THE SAHARA," "THE WOMAN HE DESIRED," "A WREATH OF STARS"

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To My Friend
DOROTHEA THORNTON CLARKE

PREFACE

These pictures of West Africa, and the struggle of the white man against the ever-encroaching jungle, will carry to even the most casual reader a sense of bigness and depth that is rarely found in the fiction written about the Dark Continent. Anglo-Saxon endeavor in the African colonies is an old story to some of us—to those who have felt the fascination of the "bush" and the tropical night—and came away only to return.

To us, who know Miss Gerard, this story will bring many pleasant memories. "The White Woman of Alondi" has not been forgotten, nor do we fail to remember the "manager" with his strange ideas of love. If the story rings true, we can understand why.

R. A. C.

JUNGLE LOVE

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CHAPTER I

The thread of each life is nearly always knotted and tangled with a variety of others, and it generally happens that we cannot wind our own particular strand in the way we would wish; but now and again the chance occurs, and, if we are wise, we seize on it with alacrity.

However, had you pointed out to Dorothy Gale that this was exactly what she had done, she would have been both hurt and surprised. She always made a fetish of duty, not blatantly, but in the hidden corners of her heart. From her early school-days until her twenty-third year she had stifled all her yearnings for a wider outlook and a more varied existence than Mrs. Gale's straitened circumstances allowed of, and had adapted herself to the narrow sphere that was hers. It had never struck Dorothy that her mother was the one real obstacle that stood between her and her desires; her only thought had been to make their gray lives a little brighter, and her mother's death had been a greater grief to the girl than to any other member of the family.

Dorothy was a tall, slim girl, with a small, pale face, a shy, gentle, unassuming manner, and a proud look at the back of her soft gray eyes. Dark brown

hair hung in loose pretty waves on her forehead, and was tucked away in heavy coils in the nape of her neck; beyond that, her only outward attractions lay in grace of movement and sweetness of expression. She was the fifth daughter of a university professor —the youngest son of a Lincolnshire baronet—a man who had been a great explorer in his youth, who had died before her sixth birthday, leaving his wife to bring up a brood of seven girls on an income of £200 a year—an allowance from his eldest brother.

Soon after Professor Gale's death it had occurred to Dorothy that some one ought to take the brunt of the home and the cares of housekeeping from her mother's overburdened shoulders; and, as time went on, it generally happened that in the evening, when her sisters were studying in the sitting-room of the small villa they occupied, Dorothy was in the kitchen washing up the supper things or preparing for the next day's breakfast. When the other girls grew older the same idea appeared to dawn on them also, and Dorothy was unanimously voted into the sphere she had already made her own, and which she filled without murmur until her twenty-third year.

The education of the Gale girls had been a matter of very little expense; they had inherited their father's cleverness and their mother's capability, and where there were scholarships to be had, the sisters, with the exception of Dorothy, got them.

Just after the latter's twenty-third birthday Mrs. Gale died, leaving £500 insurance money to be divided among her daughters, all of whom, except Dorothy, had chosen their careers and were in a position to keep themselves. She, however, had

made some provision against the future; she possessed all the medals the St. John's Ambulance society could give, and held a certificate for dispensing, together with a large and practical knowledge of housekeeping and cookery.

On her mother's death she had looked round for some means of welding her few accomplishments into a whole, and had invested the greater portion of her inheritance in a year's training as a premium-pupil at a London hospital of note—where she now had been for nearly four months—thinking that a nursing certificate, together with those she already held, would bring about what she most desired—to travel and see a little of the world, which, up till then, had been mostly viewed from the kitchen window of a cheap villa in a small provincial town.

However, these things were far enough away from her mind as she dismounted at Fenchurch Street Station at about half-past eleven one November night, and made towards Lower Thames Street. A day's leave from the hospital had been utilized in visiting one of her sisters, and a subsequent fog, on the return journey, had resulted in the train being nearly an hour late. Her exchequer was not one that allowed of cabs, or even bus fares, if the journey could possibly be walked; and this route had been chosen as the quickest from the station to the hospital, which lay on the south side of London Bridge. A two hours' extension of leave permitted of her absence until midnight.

Lower Thames Street is all but deserted in the evening; it runs like a deep cutting, parallel with the river, on the city side of London Bridge. At

twenty to twelve Dorothy Gale turned into it; a raw night, that had succeeded a day of almost constant drizzle, made this no spot to be chosen by the fastidious except in a case of dire haste. The dank blackness was broken at long intervals by blobs of light that glistened in an oily manner on the slush of the road: most of the buildings in the thoroughfare were of the office and warehouse variety, and no light, other than the County Council provided, helped to liven the murkiness.

A gust of wind came tearing through the darkness to greet the girl as she turned the corner, making her pause for a moment, half-inclined to turn back, for in the whole of her twenty-three years she had never been in quite such a deserted spot alone at an hour fast approaching midnight. Then a recollection of stringent hospital rules made her gather the folds of her waterproof together and plunge into the unknown, going with all possible speed towards the first oasis of light. Shadows crawled and writhed and made frantic lunges at her as she flew along, and every noise, by day so familiar, was now something strange and unrecognizable.

The lamp was reached before the most grasping of the shadows had been able to put as much as a finger on her ankles. She paused for breath. A wet gust caught her waterproof, making it flap like a pair of leather wings. She seized the garment tightly to stop the noise, then, drawing a long breath, plunged into the succeeding vista of darkness.

On nearing the next area of light, a figure looming

up there made her pause quickly and draw back into the friendly shelter of a doorway.

Ahead was a broad, thick-set man of seafaring appearance, clad in a pair of greasy canvas trousers and a faded jersey; his lips were moving, and he stood swaying from side to side as if intoxicated. Dorothy had a good view of him as she stayed huddled up in the shadows, glad of the darkness through which she had fled, hitherto, with amazing speed. A soiled red handkerchief was knotted round a thick, bronzed neck; a greasy cap was pulled over a thatch of hair much beyond the regulation length; a week's growth of beard rendered the cut of his features somewhat indistinct, and did not improve the appearance of a face already marred by a slashing scar across the left cheek.

For some moments she watched him, knowing precious time was being lost—as it was she would only just reach the hospital by midnight. Presently he swung round and staggered on, quickly lost in the next patch of darkness.

Dorothy crossed the road, avoiding the lamplight, the grasping shadows all forgotten in a desire to out-manœuvre the man just ahead. When the faint light of the next lamp loomed up, she crossed the road again to escape the too friendly glare. The echo of reeling footsteps came through the wet mist, showing he was now behind.

The succeeding blob of light was avoided in the same way; then she quickened her pace, relieved at having escaped the intoxicated sailor so easily. All at once a sound, that drifted to her on the moan of the wind, made her halt abruptly. From some-

where behind came a sudden scuffle, a strangled shout, a heavy thud and a groan, followed by the frantic scratching of iron-shod boots on the pavement.

Her first instinct was to run as fast as possible from the scene; but the groan held her. Through the darkness came the sounds of a further scrimmage, a hoarse gurgling shout for assistance, and the clamp of heavy feet that told of a desperate struggle. She listened with thumping heart, hospital and hours all forgotten. A little broken cry came from her lips, that the wind caught up and dispersed in a mocking echo. There was another call for aid, hoarse and desperate, that sent her in the direction of the sound.

Dorothy had no clear idea of what she expected to see; her mind had fixed on the drunken sailor as the author of the disturbance. The struggle was taking place just outside the area of the second lamp she had avoided. At a swift, breathless run she went on, and in the murkiness made out an indistinct swaying bulk, that, on approach, developed into a couple of men, locked tightly together, panting and straining, each endeavoring to throw off the other. One was the sailor, the other a much taller man, who appeared to be well dressed; but more the darkness prevented her seeing.

Almost as she caught sight of them, the taller threw his opponent. As the sailor made no attempt to rise, the other dropped on his knees beside him when the sound of Dorothy's approach became audible. The victor glanced round sharply, and, as his eyes fell on her, got to his feet hastily, standing with his back to the light.

Breathless and panting, she halted at his side.

"Has—has he hurt you?" she gasped, at once concluding that he was the one who had been attacked.

Until hospital days Dorothy had not been called upon to analyze either characters or situations; they had all come to her with the hall-mark of her mother's judgment; her own conclusions were apt to be somewhat hasty, and very often wide of the mark.

A rather strained laugh greeted her query, and there was the least pause before he replied:

"Not at all. The brute caught a Tartar when he set on me."

The voice was an educated one. Dorothy glanced at the speaker, glad that the sailor had been overpowered without her intervention, but could get no impression of his features, as they were so screened by his cap and muffler. She was not naturally glib of tongue, and the circumstances rendered her even less so than usual. Her gaze went from him to the man on the pavement, on whom the light fell more fully. He was not good to look at as he lay covered with mud, with the blood from his bruised lips trickling down the stubble of his chin, and dazed, bloodshot eyes fixed on the two above him.

The voice of the victor roused her.

"He looks a bit of a ruffian, doesn't he?"

She gazed at the prostrate man compassionately.

"Do you think he's much hurt?" she inquired.

"Only a trifle stunned. Would you mind going and informing the police whilst I wait here to see he doesn't get away?"

Dorothy did not comply immediately but took a

step forward with the idea of wiping the blood from the sailor's injured face. At the movement her foot struck against something lying on the pavement, and sent it with a metallic click, flashing into the circle of lamplight, where it lay, a sharp, bright sheath knife, of the kind frequently carried by seafaring men.

Her horrified exclamation brought the eyes of the man beside her to the weapon. He glanced at her keenly, and laughed.

"That's the thing he attacked me with. Rather pretty, isn't it? Now, you run for the police."

It was said very carelessly. She was about to obey, for, seeing the knife, and the idea of one man attacking another with such a weapon, had filled her with a horror that stifled all the pity the sailor's forlorn condition had aroused; then duty said she ought to render all possible assistance to the hurt and injured. With a little shiver of repulsion she knelt by the prostrate man, putting her ungloved fingers on the wrist of one of the powerful hands lying clenched on the pavement.

At her touch the coarse fingers unclasped, and something was pressed into her hand.

"I'll give it you, darling, if you want it, but you shouldn't have deceived me so cruel," a voice said feebly.

The whisper was so faint that it could not have reached the other man, and Dorothy's attitude hid the action. Mechanically her fingers stiffened over what had been given into her keeping; just as mechanically the nursing instinct said the man had a temperature and a pulse savoring of fever and

delirium; that he was not intoxicated, as she had imagined. For the first time it occurred to her to wonder why she had not observed the second man, whilst the one prostrate before her had taken no pains to hide his whereabouts, and why the former should be so muffled and take such care to avoid the lamplight falling on him; also that the voice that had called for aid resembled the sailor's more than that of the shrouded figure standing beside her. Hers was not a mind that could grapple quickly with the unexpected. The hour, the dark, deserted street, the knife, the fight, formed a lurid, ghastly picture in her imagination. It seemed to her that she was in the midst of murder, and that the man behind her was the author of it.

Her brain started to whirl. A would-be murderer, prostrate and helpless, was a thing to shudder at, but to find she had been mistaken, that the real perpetrator of the crime was close behind her, talking and acting in a perfectly natural manner, brought a wave of fear such as she had never experienced before. For a moment horror held her frozen.

A voice from behind addressed her sharply.

"I'll see to him. You go for the police. I've no time to waste."

There was a touch of impatience in the tone. Dorothy got up quickly. A gleam of eyes came through the darkness. She was conscious of speaking, but had no idea what she said. Then she turned and ran, with only a desire to get beyond the reach of that knife.

A quarter past twelve struck when Dorothy reached the hospital. Her perturbed appearance

was put down to her being after hours. Without a word concerning her adventure she passed up to her bedroom. She removed her wet outer garments, drew up a chair to the window and sat there in darkness, trying to form some impression of the man who had attacked the sailor; but, beyond the fact that he had been tall and broad, his voice that of a gentleman, and that he had been attired in an overcoat and cap, she could remember nothing.

She had reached London Bridge thankful for her own safety; then her mind had swung back to the man whom she imagined she had left to the mercy of a murderer. She had panted out something to a passing pedestrian. He had darted away for a policeman. There had been shrill whistles, some commotion, and an eager little crowd had surged after the constables in the direction of the tragedy. She had gone on, not daring to stay lest the dark street below should deliver up a corpse—a fellow-human deserted by her in his hour of need.

She shivered with cold and self-mortification, conscious only of the cowardliness of her flight, and a feeling that she had failed in her duty. It did not strike her to consider how she could have protected the victim from one of the strength and physique of his assailant.

With eyes fixed on the scene beneath her she sat contemplating her behavior. Below loomed a faintly illuminated square, leading up to the hospital proper. A big flare of light shone out from an archway, opposite the gate, where the front surgery was situated, into which all night cases were taken. Dorothy sat listening for any sound along the de-

serted road, knowing that if there were any life left in the man this would be the place to which he would be brought.

A cab came rattling along, through the gate, across the square, halting at the steps leading up to the archway. Strained eyes watched to get a glimpse of the form carried out from the vehicle. The light fell on a district nurse bringing in some woman from the adjacent slums. The cab rumbled away, and all was silence again.

Dorothy got up and wrapped a rug about her shoulders; just then she would have sacrificed all her hopes of a wider life for a glimpse of a burly, unshaven sailor.

Presently, down the street echoed the steady tramp of feet with a fixed destination. A little procession swung in at the gate—four constables with a hand ambulance. They passed up the square, pausing at the foot of the steps. A nurse and a doctor came from the surgery; the latter turned back the corner of the litter. A man's face showed, bruised and bleeding, with an ugly scar across the left cheek.

A little hysterical laugh broke from Dorothy's lips. Then he had not been killed!

She drew the blind and lighted a candle, a blur of tears making everything dance before her. Her hand went to her pocket in search of a handkerchief. As the latter was drawn out, there came a rustle of paper. A dark grey envelope met her view, muddy and crumpled, neatly cut along the top. For the first time since her hurried flight from Lower Thames Street she recollected the letter that had been given

into her keeping. Holding it close to the candle, she read the following almost obliterated address:—

"Mark Harrison, Esq.,
"Three Palms,
"Melbourne,
"Australia."

She drew out the contents: a sealed letter, a trifle soiled, with traces of big, dirty fingers on it, yellowed as if by sun or age, and worn at the corners, with "Kingston's Letter, The Ruganei Affair," and the initials "M.H." across it, in a writing that, despite its strength and firmness, had an illiterate look.

The high sense of honor in Dorothy forbade her opening this. She looked at it for some time, calling to mind what the sailor had said on giving it to her, knowing that in his delirium he must have mistaken her for some one else. Eventually she put it back into the envelope. Then, tired out with the strain of the last hour, she undressed and got into bed, and in sleep forgot the events of the evening.

CHAPTER II

The whole of the principal medical ward of the hospital where Dorothy was a probationer, admired the way No. 17 clung on to the shred of life that remained in him. He had double pneumonia, malarial fever, a broken rib, besides several well-defined bruises that spoke of his having been in a desperate scrimmage, either of his first-named ailments sufficiently severe to render the case of the average patient critical.

But No. 17 was no ordinary man; he had a chest measurement exceeding that of the hospital's most noted athlete, and a constitution that refused to succumb to the ills heaped upon him.

He had been brought to the hospital late one night. One of the constables who had assisted with the ambulance explained that a man had told him that some woman had said a murder was being committed in Lower Thames Street. He (the policeman) had arrived on the scene to find a man lying, battered and unconscious, in the gutter. Judging from his mauled condition, and that he appeared to have been the subject of a hasty search, robbery might have been at the bottom of the assault, yet his poverty-stricken appearance made this very unlikely.

Neither did it seem to be a case of attempted murder; for, although a knife had been found lying

near him, he bore no traces of its having been used in the scrimmage.

The injured man had proved to be a ship's stoker. His jersey was marked *Santa Lucia*, to which boat the police had gone in search of information, for no other clue to his identity had been obtained from his apparel and possessions, the latter very few—a pipe, a tooth-brush, and sevenpence in coppers.

The captain of the *Santa Lucia* had told all he knew, which amounted to very little. Beyond that the man's name was Watson, that he had been shipped as stoker at Cape Town, and that he had left the vessel a fortnight before his appearance in hospital, the authorities culled nothing. A search had been made for the woman who had given the alarm; the man to whom she had spoken had no remembrance of her beyond that she was pale and slim and tallish. As they had been unable to find her, the matter waited until the injured party had recovered sufficiently to give his version of the affair. In the face of these developments the police were inclined to think the thing nothing more than a sailors' brawl.

No trace of the woman being forthcoming, the complete disappearance of the assailant, the lack of information concerning Watson, and that no one had come forward claiming kinship with or knowledge of him, had given an air of mystery to the affair dear to sensation-mongers; and the gutter Press exploited the case, with solutions of their own, for the benefit of their readers.

Now, a man entered on his bed-letter as "Watson, ship's stoker," struggled with a triple complication,

keeping a desperate, feverish hold on a life that had apparently brought him nothing.

Meanwhile, in another ward of the hospital, Dorothy Gale pursued her duty, getting occasional bulletins concerning No. 17 from a fellow-probationer told off specially to nurse him, not daring to inquire too often lest a motive should be attached to her action.

Dorothy was learning that the longer one puts off an explanation the more difficult that explanation becomes. In the first place, she had made no mention of her encounter in Lower Thames Street, because she had been too unstrung to stand the comments her story would have brought. The morning after her adventure, as she dressed to go on duty, it occurred to her that if the matron heard of her presence in such a quarter, at that hour of the night, a severe lecture would be dealt out to her. Therefore, she decided to say nothing about the matter.

For three days conscience approved of this decision. On the fourth, one of her patients, in possession of a Sunday paper given to lurid and graphic description of crimes of a sordid nature, drew her attention to an account of an attempted murder, the victim of which had become an inmate of the hospital. The narrative had been a very highly colored one, full of startling solutions and headings in bold type. One, in particular, riveted Dorothy's attention: "WHO WAS THE WOMAN IN THE CASE?"

With a thrill of horror she became aware that she was the person referred to! That the version of calling the attack "attempted murder" had originated from her statements did not occur to her, nor

did she take into account the exaggerating powers of the Press. The thing loomed before her with its sordid surmises and insinuations, cutting into her sensitive nature, making her doubly glad she had made no mention of her connection with the affair.

That night, however, a further review of the situation made her realize for the first time that in remaining silent she was shielding a criminal. It was her duty to tell the police all she knew. Much as she shrank from publicity, she had gone to sleep determined to assist justice.

The next day was her long day on duty, from eight in the morning until eight at night, when an hour's leave fell to her lot. Owing to the absence of one of the members of the staff, an extra rush of work encroached on her brief hour to such an extent that it was nearly nine before she left the ward, allowing no time to follow out her decision. She had gone to bed finding her determination wavering, and a little inward voice arguing that it seemed as though she were fated to say nothing of the matter.

The following afternoon brought her three hours that might be devoted to her own pursuits. At two o'clock she had left her ward and gone to her room, had put on her outdoor uniform, and left the precincts of the building with an air of firmness and resolve about her soft mouth.

She had made for the nearest police station.

On nearing there it struck her to wonder what feasible reason could be given for her prolonged silence, and what motive might be attached to it—the wild hazards of the Sunday paper were still very vivid before her. In imagination she heard the

questions that would be poured upon her, saw the eyes of the world fixed on her as a woman who had helped a law-breaker to escape—her career as a nurse perhaps damaged.

For some minutes she stood there undecided, a vivid imagination running riot, then she turned away quickly.

The following days had been filled with remorse, the twinges of an all too lively conscience, and a hope that when the injured man recovered he would have no recollection of her.

But there still remained the problem of the letter.

This had occupied her mind ever since she had discovered that the hidden weaknesses of her nature prevented her acting in accordance with what was obviously her duty. It was foremost in her thoughts one evening about a week after her adventure. Her first idea had been to give it back to the man as soon as he recovered reason, but from the Sunday paper had been culled the fact that his name was Watson, and that he came from South Africa—circumstances that led her to wonder whether the letter had come into his possession legally. However, she determined to do what she considered her duty regarding that, arguing that if one found a letter in the street one would forward it on to the given destination. She would send the letter to Mark Harrison, of Australia, together with a note giving her name and address, and a request that if the owner could not be found to return it to her.

One evening during supper, a few days after the letter had been sent off, the girl who was "special"

on Watson addressed her from the other side of the table:

"To-day my patient was rational for the first time, but he doesn't remember anything of the fight except that some one hit him and he hit back."

"But what about the knife?" Dorothy asked indifferently, not wanting to show too much interest in the affair.

"He says that's his. The police think some tramp must have noticed how ill he was and attacked him for the little money he may have had. Then the woman coming along frightened him off."

"Had anything been stolen from him?" Dorothy asked, anxious to find out if any mention had been made of the letter.

"No; he says he had nothing except the few things that were found on him," the other answered, as the sister rose for grace.

Dorothy was relieved to hear that Watson had no recollection of her; at the same time she knew the police were wrong in their conclusion. The man who had been with Watson did not belong to the tramp class, nor did it seem likely that money was the object of his assault. He must have attacked the sailor in order to gain possession of the letter. He might even have been Mark Harrison; yet the writing on the unopened letter was hardly that of an educated person, and he certainly had spoken like one.

A whole army of theories invaded her brain. Watson had been delirious when he had given her the letter; that he had not mentioned it showed either the subject was one he wanted to keep quiet, or that

he deemed he had given the letter into the keeping of the woman he had mistaken her for. She ought to tell him her share in the affair. Yet to do so might mean a further hue and cry with police and papers. To tell the truth now, after more than a week's silence, would bring a glare of notoriety upon her that she felt she could not face. Her head swam in trying to solve the difficulties that surrounded her. She made some suitable reply to her fellow-probationer's remarks, and decided to let things take their course.

The days of Watson's slow recovery went on, but they brought no further clue to his assailant. The man treated the affair with indifference, and all questions the authorities put to him concerning himself, with reticence.

A month passed. Then came the quarterly removal of nurses—each to another ward—known in hospital parlance as "The Change."

The last thing Dorothy Gale desired was to be stationed in the ward that held Watson, late of the *Santa Lucia;* yet this was the sphere she found herself called upon to enter at the quarterly change.

She approached her new ward with many misgivings. After having been there a few days, it appeared to her that whenever she was in the place Watson's eyes were on her. The feeling was a decidedly uncomfortable one, and she momentarily expected to have her identity proclaimed. As time went on and nothing was said, she tried to persuade herself that it was only her imagination, not an effort on the man's part to recall her to memory.

One afternoon, however, on entering the kitchen

to fetch some flower vases, an observation she overheard the ward-maid make to the woman who came twice a week to scrub, swept away this soothing solution.

"When Nurse Gale's in the ward," greeted her as she opened the door, "that there 17 'e never takes 'is eyes orf 'er, 'e don't."

Her entry caused a silence to fall on the gossipers. Dorothy collected her vases and went out, her mind running on what she had just heard. Being visiting day the ward was crowded with the patients' friends —three at least to each bed, a constant stream coming and going. Only one solitary figure showed up—that of a thick-set man of medium height, clad in the red woolen dressing-gown the hospital provided for convalescents, sitting by the fire watching the people.

Dorothy's gaze went to him at once. Watson, washed and shaven, was much more attractive than on the occasion she had dodged him in Lower Thames Street. He was a man of about thirty-four, with a dogged jaw and a straight nose, a hard, weather-beaten face that still showed bronzed in spite of the severe illness he had come through, as though a more powerful sun than England's had bitten into it. Despite his broad, clumsily built figure, he had an air of superiority that set him somewhat above his surroundings.

During her few days in the ward Dorothy had not come in contact with him except when in company with some other nurse on a bed-making round; Watson's quarters were in the back ward, her duties kept her principally in the front.

She crossed to a tiled table, aware that his gaze was now on her, and stood there, with her back to the room, arranging flowers.

All at once an unexpected voice addressed her.

"You and I, Nurse, seem to be the only people here devoid of relatives."

Dorothy knew the voice! she had heard it in conversation with other patients: it was difficult to locate, harsh and lacking culture, yet with none of the glaring peculiarities and mispronunciations of the majority of the patients.

She looked round with a quick start, and a slight flush, into eyes just on a level with her own, assigning but one motive to Watson's desire for conversation.

In endeavoring to answer his remark easily, nervousness made her give more information than was her wont, or than was fitting for the occasion.

"I've six sisters," she said, "four of them college mistresses, the two youngest still at Girton, and two uncles, one a General in India, the other has an estate in Lincolnshire, so I can't be said to be devoid of relatives."

This statement brought an amused look to the man's face.

"I can't boast of anything so close as a sister, but I've an uncle who keeps a fried fish shop in Whitechapel, and an aunt an old clothes dealer."

His reply silenced Dorothy, making her realize that to one in his circumstances her response had been both vaunting and tactless. She tried to find some remark to excuse her thoughtless answer, but her tongue was not of the nimble variety. His gaze

obsessed her, filling her with a nervousness that confused her and made her uncertain of what she said.

"Why do you always stare at me so?" she asked, feeling she could endure suspense no longer.

"I beg your pardon, Nurse. I'd no intention of annoying you."

"But why *do* you?"

A flicker of surprise crossed his face at the repeated question; his reply had none of the deference that had marked his previous comments.

"Because you are always staring at me," he answered.

The explanation was hardly what Dorothy had expected. She was well aware of having kept a covert watch on him. The subtle change in his voice said she had been accused of fishing for compliments —had been classed as a woman of the kind who fish for flattery in any waters, no matter how polluted. The last thing she wanted was a compliment from such a source; in her, very markedly, was the well-bred woman's antipathy for a man of the "lower orders." However, the momentary sense of anger she experienced at such a motive being assigned to her, was quickly lost in the relief of knowing that it was only her own watching that had attracted the man's attention.

Watson left her without any further attempt at conversation. She watched him go, the whole time a lively conscience saying that she owed him an explanation about the letter.

The knowledge of how she had failed in this way made her, in her nursing capacity, doubly solicitous of his comfort and well-being, so much so that the

gossips in the kitchen remarked, " 'Ow that Nurse Gale do 'ang round that there 17."

Yet, a few days after this remark had been made, Dorothy went to a small room adjacent to the ward, that was devoted to the reception of the patients' clothes, with a feeling of great relief in her heart. That afternoon, Watson was to be discharged from hospital; henceforth there would be no constant reminder of duties not accomplished.

The stuffy little closet she entered was walled round by an array of pigeon-holes, each with a number corresponding to the bed the patient occupied, and in each reposed, all carefully folded, a bundle of clothes tied up with white roller bandage, with a paper affixed on which was written the name, number, and list of possessions of the owner.

She removed the bundle from the pigeon-hole marked 17, and untied it gingerly, with disgust on her face at the odour of stale tobacco that emanated from it, to make sure the contents were according to list. There came to light a big pair of boots, socks full of holes, a faded jersey, a pair of canvas trousers, underclothing decidedly the worst for wear, a red handkerchief, a pipe, a tooth-brush, and an old leather purse containing sevenpence in coppers.

The last riveted Dorothy's attention. In the course of her hospital career she had come across several derelicts of Watson's kind; wrecks picked up from the gutter, nourished and succored for a time, then, after a few weeks of comparative luxury and comfort whilst the hospital cured their ailments, turned loose again on a world that had no place for

them. It always pained her to see these derelicts going out in rags and without sufficient money either to get a decent lodging or a square meal. She could never get up the anger and indignation other members of the staff did, when some of the patients of this kind shammed illness and relapse for the sake of getting a few more days in a place which had given them what they received but seldom—care, comfort, and consideration. To Dorothy it seemed but natural they should part with these things reluctantly, even stoop to artifice to retain them. Watson, however, had shown no desire to encroach on the hospital's charity; on the other hand, he had made an application for his discharge before the authorities deemed him fit to stand any change.

As Dorothy looked at the purse and its meagre supply of all that spelt comfort, there came, with renewed conviction, the knowledge that she had not acted fairly by the owner, and a desire to make amends in a way that would be appreciated.

She got out her own purse—just then full with the proceeds of a small check from one of her uncles, that represented her next quarter's pocket-money—and emptied the contents into the shabby one, knowing it was now two o'clock and her afternoon off duty, and that she would be beyond questioning should Watson remark on the increased state of his exchequer—a very unlikely circumstance.

The bundle was tied up again and taken into the ward.

"Here are 17's clothes," she remarked, giving them to a fellow-nurse. "I'm 'off' now, so will you take

them to him? I went through them and all's according to list."

Three hours later, when Dorothy returned to work, No. 17 bed was empty. She stripped it of its coverings and scrubbed it with a right goodwill; then turned out and carbolized the adjacent locker, burning the few old papers that were there. As they curled and crackled away up the chimney, black and charred, the last link of that evening's undesired adventure seemed to be removed.

CHAPTER III

The last Thursday in January brought Dorothy the great event of the month—her whole day "off duty." At nine o'clock she was not hard at work, rushing round a ward endeavoring to finish her many duties within a given time, as was her wont twenty-seven days out of twenty-eight, but sitting up in bed eating toast and marmalade in a very leisurely manner, keeping a watch on the weather at the same time.

She had decided to devote the day either to the Zoological Gardens or the British Museum, with no conscientious desire for knowledge, but because they told of a world beyond the narrow sphere in which she had always moved. The state of the weather was to decide which.

Dorothy had but few friends in the hospital; the amusements and interests of the average woman there had but little charm for her; she found no pleasure in shop windows, theatres, concerts, or luncheons and teas partaken of in cafés to the accompaniment of third-rate music. Until her arrival at the institution she had rarely been beyond the precincts of her family, and had mixed very little with strangers; this, her shyness, and her inability to thrust herself forward, rendered it not easy for her to make the first overtures towards friendship; and, owing to her lack of tastes in common with those

around her, her fellow-nurses did not go out of their way to woo her company.

As she went on slowly with her breakfast, the dull gray morning took on a gloomier tint as the clouds gathered together with an air of determination. Half an hour later, when she got up, a thin mist of rain was drifting across the square, saying amusement must be sought under cover.

Since her adventure in Lower Thames Street the girl had avoided going out in anything but uniform, fearing that in ordinary clothes she might be recognized. However, since Watson's discharge from the hospital, now nearly a fortnight ago, the newspapers had dropped the case.

All appertaining to her recent midnight adventure was forgotten later on in the morning as she turned into the British Museum, and went upstairs to that section of the building devoted to a collection of curios from savage lands. From her earliest childhood things of the kind had had the greatest fascination for her. They told of races very different from her own; of lives lived in surroundings that had all the charm of distance and the unattainable; they brought a craving for something not held within four walls; a desire to be with a people whose habits and customs were not those of her forefathers; to see lands just as God left them—the instincts of the born wanderer and explorer that had been inherited from her father.

As she was looking into one of the cases an unexpected voice addressed her, making her turn sharply with a touch of color on her pale face.

"Well, Nurse, have you forgotten an old patient?"

Standing beside her was a broad-shouldered man in a cheap, ready-made tweed suit, with spotless linen, a tie decidedly crude in coloring, and a cloth cap crumpled up in his hand. He was clean shaven, with closely cropped hair that gave him a convict-like appearance.

As Dorothy looked at him the scar across his left cheek proclaimed his identity. The fact of seeing the mainspring of a circumstance she had put behind her, left her aghast and speechless, too startled to consider Watson's changed aspect.

Her confusion was not lost on him.

"I was going to the hospital to see you this afternoon," he went on, "but I needn't now I've met you here."

"Why?" was all she could gasp.

"Can't you guess without me telling you?"

There was amusement and raillery in his voice. Dorothy, with thoughts running on the letter she had sent to Australia and the explanation she owed him, noted nothing of this. A guilty conscience said he had found out her portion in that night's adventure, and had come to her to demand the letter and the reason of her silence. A flush of shame crept over the small face beneath the close-fitting, unbecoming nurse's bonnet. She glanced at him nervously, dreading his next comment, knowing there was no excuse for her conduct, prepared to undergo any amount of upbraiding rather than admit that weakness of character was at the bottom of her actions.

He waited for her to reply. As, after a brief pause, she showed no sign of doing so, he addressed her again.

"Do you make a custom of tipping all your patients in the liberal manner you did me?"

His reason for wishing to see her flashed on her, bringing a feeling of intense relief.

"No, I don't," she faltered.

"Then why was I singled out for such attentions?"

There was no reply, but the pink deepened to a fiery crimson. Obviously ill at ease, and unable to find an evasive answer, Dorothy looked anywhere but at the man beside her.

His voice broke the silence.

"Well, Nurse, with the money you gave me I was able to buy a rig-out respectable enough to apply for decent employment in. I've got a berth abroad and am on my feet again. And I want you to accept this for your kindness to me, which I'm grateful for though I can't do much in return. It made me think there must be still a bit of decency left in me, or you wouldn't have taken a fancy to me. And these last few years."

Into Dorothy's astonished gaze was thrust an open jewel-case, and in it a four-leafed clover in emeralds, the cost of which must have run into nearly three figures.

She looked from it to Watson. He was watching her in a way that held no vestige of respect or deference, or any recognition of their social difference.

His estimate of her gradually forced itself on the girl.

She stared at him with slowly dawning comprehension. In the hospital he had put down her desire to do all possible for his comfort to a reason she

hardly dared think of; he deemed her the victim of one of those strange infatuations that occasionally seize well-bred women for some low-born member of the opposite sex—an idea, no doubt, intensified by her final gift of money.

A feeling of utter degradation swept over her. Speech forsook her. She turned away to hide her shame and mortification—his presence forgotten in the insult put upon her.

An arm was slipped carelessly around her, and lips touched hers.

"Good-by, you sweet little fool, a laughing voice whispered. "And don't throw yourself so openly at every man who takes your fancy, or you mayn't always get off so lightly."

When Dorothy got back to earth there was an emerald brooch flashing on the table beside her, and a custodian watching her with mingled sternness and curiosity.

CHAPTER IV

The Alondi district of Ashanti, despite its natural beauty, has but few attractions except for those in search of mineral wealth. It is one of the parts of West Africa devoted to gold-mining. The vast areas of undulating forest-clad hills are so densely wooded that the little red sand patches, where men have cut down trees and rooted up the earth in quest of the precious metal, come as a welcome break in a wilderness of choking vegetation. All these little open spaces are more or less linked together by a narrow cutting through an endless sea of green, where the gleaming lines of a railway flash silver in a golden sun.

The moist heat of a hot-house hangs continually over Alondi, creating a perpetual steam bath. It is impossible to escape the moisture; it oozes up from the earth by day and drips down from a tangle of greenery by night. The troughs of the forest are rarely free from fog-banks, dormant during the day, but that rise up and spread a thin, rank, stifling mist —with the stench of a rubbish heap left festering since the creation—over the whole landscape at sundown.

The poisonous miasma brings malaria, which, if the European is not careful, seizes him and chokes the life out of him before he is aware of it. Yellow fever visits there at times and plays havoc with the

natives, taking occasional toll of a white man. Amusement, as understood by the average mind, is painfully lacking; there is said to be shooting and fishing in the district, but the forests around abound principally in insect life, though a leopard does stray down there occasionally, and mud fish are to be had if one cares to probe swamps in search of them.

Through dearth of other occupations the Europeans of the district spend their leisure hours chiefly in drinking and gambling. Alondi is not a nice place to be bound to for two or three years on end, unless one's tastes and interests lie in the cult of the wild. However, when the mining companies require any addition to their white staff they never mention the drawbacks; great stress is laid on the natural beauty of the country and the shooting and fishing that may be obtained thereabouts.

The principal mines of Alondi are situated in and about the township from which the district takes its name, and where the Government headquarters are placed. The governing powers are very few—a commissioner and a couple of military officers. Their quarters are situated on the highest point immediately surrounding the mining settlement, looking down on a wide, wooded country bounded by an apparently trackless forest that melts away to thin haze in the distance.

Lilian Ashby had studied the view very often during the two years her brother had been commissioner. Immediately beneath was a gigantic hollow, like a badly made cup with a piece chipped out of one side from rim to base; through this the railway came, disappearing again through some unseen crack on

the other side. To the left was a cleared hill with a sprinkling of corrugated iron buildings and a chimney or two—the Mussatti mine—the most important in the district. Then came a fringe of trees, and from behind them spirals of faint gray smoke curled up against the sky, indicating the position of the native village; then dense forest again, with a tiny parting like a red line—a sand path leading to some distant mine. Among the thinned-out trees of the cup-like valley was the glint of tin-roofed trading factories, with here and there a brown patch marking the site of some palm-thatched bungalow.

Behind, a glorious sunset fired the mist rolling up from the hollows, sending it in banks of glowing gold over the vivid green of the forest. In the west a crimson sun was settling down into a bed of amethyst clouds, that broke off and drifted across the sky in little fluffs of pink and red and orange. Up from the back a faint luminous green life was merging.

Lilian Ashby noticed nothing of this—a newly arrived batch of English papers held her attention.

She was a big woman of about thirty-seven, with a quantity of yellow hair and a vivid mouth—a woman thickened and coarsened a little by time, but still remarkably handsome.

No one in Alondi knew much of the history of Frank and Lilian Ashby, except that they were members of an obscure branch of some ducal family, who for the last two generations had lived principally by their wits, occasionally pitchforked into some appointment by influential relatives, and that Frank had held several similar posts in the service, each of less worth than the preceding one.

Frank Ashby had been at the end of his tether when a relative, anxious to be rid of him, had offered him the Alondi commissionership; and he had taken it, since the world held no prospect of a living by other means.

The sound of footsteps coming along the veranda made Lilian look up from her magazine.

A tall, well-built man of about forty came into sight—fair and handsome, with a heavy mustache and eyes of a particularly brilliant blue, intensified by the tanned condition of his skin. There was a look about him as if something had occurred to disturb the habitual nonchalance of his manner—a fact his sister noted immediately.

"What's happened?" she inquired.

He did not answer at once, but leant against the verandah rail and produced a cigarette, which he lighted before replying.

"There's a new manager coming out to the Mussatti mine," he volunteered at length.

Lilian laughed in an easy, careless way. She held the unique position of being the only white woman in Alondi Town.

"That means a little fresh ground for me."

"I'm not so sure," he responded.

"Why not?"

"Because it happens to be Mark Harrison."

The magazine she was holding dropped to the ground.

Silence reigned for some time after the news had been imparted. Ashby stood flicking imaginary ash from his cigarette in a restless manner, watching his sister covertly.

All at once she laughed.

"What's amusing you" he demanded.

"The idea of 'The Reformer' out here."

Ashby joined in her laughter, but somehow his mirth sounded even more forced than hers.

CHAPTER V

"The Reformer" had descended on Mussatti with a force and vigor that startled the community; not only there, but on the adjacent mines of Jhuna and Ashranhi, which also came within his jurisdiction. His big coarse hands had seized hold of them, shaken them up heartily, and put them down again with much of their lethargy gone and a prospect of a dividend for the shareholders.

Mark Harrison was one of those people who endeavor to do their best for all around them. In those days the permanent way was not completed; Alondi Town was almost railhead. Besides the Europeans connected with the mines and stores, all the railway men congregated there for such amusement as the place afforded. In plain and forcible language the Mussatti manager said what he thought of excessive drinking; with surprising dearth of compliment he classed them all as "swine"; furthermore, he pointed out, with truth as lucid as it was unpalatable, that more than half the white deaths in Alondi were due to bad or careless habits.

He descended first on the mine doctor, an habitual drunkard, giving him three months in which to reform, promising to report him if the desired change did not take place within the period. He invaded the bungalows of his underlings, probed their kitchen premises—usually left to the care of

native servants—and discovered there many things calculated to kill the average European. He gave much good advice and the latest theories for the avoidance of malaria fever; if anyone in his employ dared get it, he tracked it back to its source, generally some drinking bout or hygienic measures left unheeded. He swore at them with the vocabulary of a navvy, and nursed them with the care of a mother. His eyes were in, and on, and around everything. The mining staff grew to dread his square shadow passing over their thresholds.

Of Harrison's history prior to his appearance in Alondi but little was known. It was rumored he had once been a millionaire, that he had struck gold somewhere in Australia; then some woman had sent him to the devil, whence he had emerged in West Africa.

At the time of his arrival at the mines the commissioner and his sister were away touring their district. Prior to the coming of the new manager, Frank Ashby had been intoxicated more frequently than usual, and had lost much of his charm of manner, acquiring an irritability that had made him difficult and dangerous to approach. However, as time went on the commissioner regained all his old nonchalance, though he and Harrison were on markedly unfriendly terms.

In Alondi Town, where men, from lack of other occupations, gossip as much as the average old woman, it had been remarked that the Mussatti manager had never gone to Government House to pay his respects, as was customary; also that he

avoided Lilian Ashby with an intentness and deliberation that gained him a name as a woman-hater.

Needless to say, Mark Harrison was not popular. Yet, at the end of three months, cases of malaria in the mines had decreased by half, though Brooks, the doctor, had not mended his ways.

It was concerning this matter that the Mussatti manager summoned the medical officer to his residence one evening shortly after the stated time had lapsed. They sat facing each other—one a tall, bloated man, with the wine-hued face of the habitual drunkard, the other of broad, thick-set build, with a hard, weather-beaten face, and shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, showing a pair of massive bronzed forearms, smoking a pipe and watching his companion disgustedly.

"So, Brooks, you can't keep off the booze?" he said presently.

"Damn you and your blasted reforms!" the doctor exclaimed viciously.

"Then I shall have to get someone who will. I must have an efficient medical. That stuff you mixed last night for young Green had enough strychnine in it to poison the whole of Alondi. I've no time to analyze every bottle you make up."

Brooks looked across at his manager with a vicious smile.

"What do you expect for a hundred and twenty pounds per annum? None but my sort'll come to this blasted hell for that. They won't shift me, I'm as good as any they'll get at the price."

Harrison said something under his breath anathematizing the cheeseparing policy of his firm. Then

he took his pipe from his mouth, pointing the stem towards the stairway leading from his veranda.

"Get out and drink yourself blind," he said slowly. "I'll keep the keys of the dispensary."

Brooks's theory proved correct. Rather more than two months later a reply to Harrison's letter came back from the company's London office, to the effect that no previous complaint had reached them concerning Dr. Brooks, who had been in their employ for nearly three years; but, considering his weakness, they had decided to engage the services of a qualified nurse, with a knowledge of dispensing, to assist him in his duties and prevent such errors as the one mentioned occurring again, and he, Harrison, was to prepare suitable quarters for her on receipt of a cablegram from them.

The letter was read through twice before the Mussatti manager thoroughly grasped its meaning. Then he rose up and sought out the doctor, descending on him with the suddenness and violence of a tornado.

"Damn you!" he said, with intense feeling; "because of your filthy habits an innocent woman is to be sent to fester in this hell. What in Heaven's name am I to do with a woman on the mine?"

When the Mussatti directors' new arrangement became known, the whole of Alondi asked the same question.

CHAPTER VI

Dorothy Gale had attained her heart's desire. At first it had appeared in streaks of brilliant color —blazing blue sky at the back; beneath, an endless line of glowing green; then a stretch of dazzling yellow sand with an edging of white where the sea broke in snowy froth.

As the steamer neared the land, more details had come in sight. In the foreground was a small high cape crowned by an old fort; at its base nestled a collection of mud huts, set in a jumble of palm and bombax trees, reaching down to the water's edge, where the surf broke in opalescent showers over jagged black rocks. To the left, as far as the eye could see, was an expanse of glowing golden sand where huge waves curled and tumbled with the noise of thunder; behind, the dark green of eternal forest melting away to shadow; between it and the beach were calm blue lagoons surrounded by high, coarse rushes, where white birds flitted, and here and there patches of black oozing swamp that had a metallic sheen. To the right was a sweeping bay backed by high land where glimpses of tin-roofed bungalows flashed between clusters of palm, orange, and mango trees. Flitting over the bay, like exclamation marks aslant the water, were tiny native canoes with narrow, triangular sails, manned by one or two dusky savages with a wisp of cloth about their loins.

From the saloon deck of a German express steamer Dorothy watched the land open out before her like some gigantic, gaudy tropical flower, noticing, perhaps, that the odor the afternoon breeze brought was not in keeping with the beauty of the scene.

To Dorothy, just five weeks before, had come the most momentous day of her life—her year at the hospital had been completed; into her hands was given a key of her own forging that would open up the world to her.

Her mind went back to that last morning at the hospital.

In the midst of her hurried work she had paused for a moment to gaze out of one of the ward windows. It was a hot, stifling August day, with a heated, dusty wind. In the street below a smutty plane tree stood, cased round with iron railings; on its branches a group of grimy sparrows quarreled; at its roots was a collection of dirty paper; beyond, a hoarding covered with advertisements; above, a fringe of chimneys of all shapes and at all angles, with one or two giants towering above the rest, belching out smoke from some factory; in the sky, a network of telegraph and telephone wires.

She had turned away from this vista of civilization.

Then the afternoon came. At two o'clock she was sitting in the outer office awaiting the matron's pleasure, watching the women around her, wondering if the narrowness of their surroundings ever brought a feeling of cramp to the verge of torture.

The voice of the assistant-matron had roused her.

"Matron wishes to see you, Nurse Gale."

She had entered the presence of the head, anxious as to whether she had passed muster, wondering whether her certificate would be a first, a second or a third-class one.

Of all that had happened there she had but a vague recollection. She had heard the matron say she would be sorry to lose so good a nurse, urging her to sign on and complete the usual three years' training, saying the offer would be kept open for three months, that she had got through her year with honor, and could depend on the hospital giving her the best of characters and recommendations.

There had followed a period of enforced idleness in lodgings, whilst she scanned all papers that might give possible posts abroad for one of her capabilities. She had but twelve pounds; if nothing turned up before that was exhausted, she would have to go back to the hospital. For a fortnight it seemed as thought no one would take her unless she possessed a three years' certificate. She had searched diligently for some advertisement not quite so exacting in its demands.

Eventually one was found.

"WANTED, a qualified nurse as matron of small cottage hospital in mining district of West Africa. Must hold certificate from recognized hospital, and be qualified dispenser. Salary £40 per annum. First-class passage out and home if two years' agreement completed. Highest references necessary. Apply the Mussatti Gold Mining Co. Ltd."

There had followed a city address; thither Dorothy went—her certificates and credentials satisfy-

ing the firm. She was told of the beauties of the Alondi district, of the hospital that would be in her charge—a compact little place with three beds and a native woman as assistant—that not only the Mussatti mine, but all cases from the Jhuna and Ashrani mines would be in her care also; that she was to have charge of the dispensary and assist the doctor with such as got chipped and damaged in the pursuit of their duty. But they made no mention of the drawbacks of Alondi, or of Brooks's shortcomings. Nor did they say that the hospital existed in imagination only; orders for the arrangement of such a place were to be sent out if a trustworthy and suitable woman could be had at the price they were prepared to pay.

The Mussatti directors admitted they had a better-class applicant than they had expected to get; they offered her a quarter's salary in advance, demanded her services at once, and shipped her out to Africa within the week.

For the first seven days of the voyage Dorothy had suffered severely from sea-sickness; afterwards shyness and not being able to speak German had prevented her from making acquaintances. She stood alone on the deck, watching the land she had agreed to stay in for two years, the only passenger to be landed there.

As the vessel dropped anchor she went down to the lower deck, awaiting the arrival of the surf-boats from the shore, about half a mile away, never doubting but what the Mussatti manager, into whose care the firm had entrusted her, would send someone to meet her. That the manager of the Mussatti

Mines should be in any way connected with the letter she had sent off nearly ten months before, had not occurred to her. He had only been referred to as "Our Mr. Harrison."

One by one the big boats came alongside, the first containing the port officials. Dorothy scanned each, but, except in the first, no glimpse of a white face showed up, only an array of black figures chattering and acting in a manner strongly suggestive of a monkey-house. She waited. The Government boat with its trio of officials left; others, with cargo, after it. For the first time since leaving England a slight qualm seized her. It was slowly dawning on the girl that the Mussatti manager had left her in the lurch.

She went to the officer stationed by the gangway.

"Has no one come on board for me yet?" she inquired.

A busy ship, with cargo all discharged, and anxious to be off again, cannot afford time to escort unclaimed passengers ashore. This Dorothy read in the eyes of the worried chief officer as he explained there had been no inquiries on her behalf.

"Then I must go alone," she said in a voice that showed none of her inward misgivings.

This decision moved some of the weight of care from the man's face.

With mingled feelings Dorothy watched her belongings lowered into the bobbing surf-boat, then she went down the gangway to be assisted into the craft by the German, where, with some instructions to the negro steersman, he left her.

The moment she was seated the steersman gave a wild yell; the voices of fourteen Kroo boys answered

him. Simultaneously fourteen paddles were plunged into the water. She looked about her. Seven negroes were perched on either side of the boat, each sitting, like a woman on a side saddle, with one foot in a rope stirrup, and each with a short, squat paddle, shaped like a duck's foot, which they dug into the water: all were attired in the merest of loin cloths, with leopards' claws in their woolly hair, and uncouth charms about their necks. High up in the stern the steersman stood, guiding the craft by means of a long sweep. The boat was not made with a view to the comfort of passengers; there were no seats beyond such as could be had by perching on the cargo; and half a foot of bilge water rushed up and down the bottom in a dirty, slimy wave with every motion.

On the top of a wooden crate Dorothy sat, her skirts huddled up around her, the novelty of her position dispelling the fear her isolated condition had aroused. The boat swung up and down in the heavy swell of a heaving green sea, clear and pellucid, broken up into a million sequins of sparkling emerald by the amber of a westering sun. The yell of the Kroo boys had died away in a quaint, wailing song, weird and wild and haunting in its liquid minor cadences, that rose and fell with the sway of the ocean. High against the hardness of the dazzling, tropic sky a sea-gull hung—a thing of startling whiteness—its peevish intermittent cry mingling with the croon of the sea, the negroes' chant, and the lapping of water against the boat's side, all blended into a whole by the boom of the distant breaking billows that was getting ever fiercer.

The surf was reached at length and the song changed to a series of grunts. The boat slid down into the trough of a wave so deep that the water formed shimmering green, glassy walls on either side, shutting out everything but a streak of blue heaven above; then was tossed up again, seemingly sky-high, and with a force that all but made it turn a somersault, to slide with express speed down the side of a mountain of water. Around surged a maelstrom of hissing, angry froth; a chaos of wild billows chased up behind, tossing the huge boat like a straw on their summits, to rush on and crash down with the roar of thunder, and with the force of the Atlantic, on the sand-fringed rim of Western Africa.

There was a final gigantic upheaval, more sickening than any, then a thundering crash, and the boiling, hissing sound of an angry sea tearing down banks of shingle.

Before Dorothy realized she was not wrecked, but landed in the customary West African manner, a couple of black arms seized her, tossed her to some ebony form standing in the water, that hugged her to its bosom and ran with her high up the beach, depositing her beyond the reach of the incoming mountain of breaking surf.

She had not regained her breath before a horde of dusky figures swooped down on her, surrounding her completely, until the world held nothing but a mass of frantic black faces with rolling eyes and huge red mouths, gesticulating, shouting, quarreling. She looked round wildly for some way of escape.

Then from the chaos came a cultured English voice, languid and amused.

"Can I be of any assistance? They seem to have dumped you down very unceremoniously."

Dorothy turned and saw one of her countrymen beside her. As he caught sight of her, full face, he gave a slight start. In an ecstasy of relief she clutched at him, lest he should be swamped in the surging savagery around.

"Oh, are you Mr. Harrison?" came out in a gasp.

"Heaven forbid!" was the pious reply. "I'm only 'that poor devil Frank Ashby,' very much at your service."

Dorothy did not know that, to men who rarely saw anything but negro women, she made a very welcome picture with her slim grace and small sweet face beneath its halo of pretty hair. At least half a dozen pairs of field-glasses had witnessed her departure from the German steamer; the landing of a white woman was an event in a place that could not boast of three. A dozen Englishmen were coming rapidly along the beach to her assistance, but Frank Ashby, just then spending a few days at the residence of the coast commissioner, reached her first.

The relief of finding one of her own countrymen swamped all Dorothy's natural shyness.

"I don't mind who you are," she said. "I'm only too pleased to see any one English."

"I can guess who you are," he replied. "The nurse consigned to Mussatti. Everybody's talking about you up there, wondering what you'll be like."

"But why should they talk about me?"

"We don't get an English girl in Alondi every day. My sister's the only white woman in the place."

Her eyes widened.

"The Mussatti people never told me."

Ashby laughed in a way that made Dorothy wonder what had been said to cause such amusement.

"You'll find there are lots of things they haven't told you," he said. "However, don't you worry; Lilian and I will see you pull through all right. Now, if you can trust yourself to me, I'll dispose of this howling crowd of savages fighting for the honor of carrying your belongings."

Dorothy was only too glad of his assistance.

As he turned away she stayed watching him as, with languid grace and scarcely more than a wave or so of his hand, he dispersed the swarm fighting over her luggage.

"Can I get up to Alondi to-night?" she inquired when he returned.

"Bless your innocence, no," he responded smilingly. "There's only one train a day up there. That leaves here at eight, approximately, in the morning, and arrives there at three, approximately, in the afternoon, if nothing unforeseen occurs, such as the niggers taking a fancy to a bit of the rail, or a few trees falling across it, or the train running off the line, or the boiler bursting, or the engine driver being seized with sunstroke, or——"

She put out her hand with a pleading gesture.

"Please don't give me any more."

Ashby laughed.

"Then I'll give you tea instead; you can't refuse that. I found you stranded below high-water mark, and by all the laws of salvage you're mine." Then turning to the porters, "Lib for hotel one-time," he ordered.

Dorothy caught one word that was intelligible.

"Then there is an hotel here?"

"Yes, one; I'm staying there." This new arrangement came out very glibly. "My sister's putting up with friends. She's absolutely rabid at the idea of another woman invading her kingdom. I'll bring her round to-night, and stand by to see you get fair play."

"You come from Alondi, then?" she asked.

"For my sins I've to live there twelve months on end."

She smiled up at a handsome face that was watching her teasingly. He was one of her own people, almost the only gentleman, beyond her near relatives, who had come into her life. She did not quite know whether to take him seriously or not, but she was very glad they were to be neighbors.

Before meeting Ashby she had felt very uneasy concerning her post at Alondi, considering that the man to whom she had been entrusted had neither troubled to come on board for her himself nor sent a substitute. Having made one friend who belonged to the place, eased the weight of anxiety a little.

They started towards the hotel, going along a sweltering, untidy beach strewn with offal, decaying vegetable matter, and the cargo that had just come from the steamer, past a trio of hideous corrugated iron sheds, that flashed back silver darts at a golden sun, and on to a broad, sandy road. This was edged with coarse grass and boulders, devoid of pavement and full of deep holes. On either side was a desolate stretch of cleared ground, with patches of rank weeds, piles of planks, sheets of corrugated iron,

rusty girders, groups of palms heavy with heat and dust, and an occasional mango tree yellow with plum-like fruit. There were half-finished bungalows scattered along the road; others, completed, with various masculine garments airing on their balconies; strings of half-naked negroes, scores of mangy curs, with now and again a sickly white face or a smart Hausa soldier in khaki and scarlet uniform.

Everything danced in a haze of heat that poured down from the cloudless sky, and struck up through the earth as though the whole place were built on a furnace.

Dorothy was thankful when the hotel was reached. The unaccustomed walk in the hot, enervating climate, after the mental strain of her solitary journey ashore, seemed to sap all strength from her. Ashby took her through an apparently deserted building, of the bungalow type, facing the bay, and left her there, ensconced in a comfortable lounge on the balcony, whilst he went in search of the manager.

He returned some minutes later with a black "boy" in his train, bearing a tray, without a cloth, on which reposed two chipped cups and saucers, a brown teapot, a tin of condensed milk, and a plate of biscuits.

"They're not used to catering for ladies here," he remarked as he seated himself. "I've sent round to borrow a cake from my sister; it'll be here in a moment. Now let me pour out. You look so tired."

She was glad to have this small duty taken off her hands.

As the meal proceeded most of the conversation

was on Ashby's side; Dorothy was too tired for much talking. She sat and listened to him, wondering what she would have done without this unexpected friend.

The arrival of the hotel manager announcing that her hotel room was ready roused them. Dorothy got up, anxious for privacy after her trying afternoon. Ashby rose also.

"If there's anything you want or don't understand, don't be afraid to come to me," he said.

She left him with ever-increasing gratitude, and was shown into her bedroom. This was a square, box-like apartment, with no windows, but a glass door, wide open and hooked back, the aperture draped with curtains.

She lay down on the bed, and stayed there in a half-doze until a string of chattering porters suddenly invaded the premises with her boxes. Their entry sent her out to the balcony in search of Ashby, to ask his aid in paying and disposing of them.

She saw him, seated in a wicker chair, in deep confabulation with what was undoubtedly a product of the country—a youth of about fourteen, attired in a single piece of cloth worn under one arm, and tied in a big donkey-eared bow on the opposite shoulder, a garment reaching to his knees. He was ebony-hued, barefooted, with a crowning thatch of woolly hair.

As Ashby's gaze fell on her he got up, bringing the boy along by one ear.

"I've taken the liberty of engaging a lady's-maid for you, Miss Gale," he said. "This, if you will accept him, is 'Peter the Great.' "

Dorothy looked at the youth with undisguised surprise. There was nothing about him to suggest such a post was within his capabilities; moreover, she had no desire for such a servitor.

"The first thing Harrison would do would be to get a 'boy' for you," Ashby went on, noting her look. "You can't get along here without an attendant black sprite. 'Peter the Great' is a chance too good to miss. A friend of my sister's had him when she was staying with us for a few weeks. If Harrison doesn't approve of our arrangement I'll take him off your hands."

"But whatever am I to do with him?" she asked.

"A week hence I'm prepared to say you'll be asking, 'Whatever am I to do without him?' His capabilities are unlimited. He will learn your tastes in eating, drinking, raiment, and literature, with a quickness absolutely uncanny. He will annex ten per cent of your belongings, not all at once, but stealthily and with intent to deceive; but any other nigger seeking to defraud you in like manner will be speedily proclaimed a thief and a wrongdoer. You are his claim; he, only, will profit by you; not the whole of Alondi, as will happen if he's not there to keep an eye on your possessions. He'll make a point of sharing your soap and scent, and won't be above using your tooth and hair brushes unless you put 'juju' on them."

"How am I to do that?" she asked, very anxious that the two latter circumstances should not come to pass.

"Explain that if he dare even touch them the God

of the white man will descend on him in wrath, and his soul will stew in hell for ever."

Dorothy looked from a twitching white face to a grinning black one in shocked amazement and dismay that gradually melted into mirth.

"Now give him your keys," Ashby went on, "and let him unpack what you want for to-night. And," he added with mock severity, turning to the boy who was watching Dorothy speculatively, "you young demon, if you don't come up to the good character I've given you I'll peel your black hide off inch by inch. Savvy?"

The threat brought a grin of huge proportions. Dorothy delivered up her keys, not without some qualms, into the paw held out for them. A black face looked up at her inquiringly.

"What him lib for chop, Ma?"

The query was in the pigeon English of the West Coast of Africa, unintelligible to the girl. She glanced with some dismay at Ashby, to find him watching her amusedly.

"Don't take any notice of his gross familiarity, Miss Gale. It's the custom of the country. You'll be 'Ma' to every nigger out here. He wants to know what you are wearing for dinner."

With decided misgivings she gave some instructions, which Ashby put into language more easily understood by her youthful servitor.

The former's assurance that all would be well proved correct.

Half an hour later, when Dorothy went to her room to dress for dinner, the frock ordered was spread out tidily on the bed, where also a nightgown

reposed. In their recognized places were brushes, comb, soap, and sponge; and in front of the mirror, admiring his profile in the candle-light by means of her hand-glass, was Peter the Great.

At her entrance he departed hastily. She drew the curtains after him; then pinned them together to prevent them from flapping open in the light breeze and making her dressing operations public to all who passed up and down the balcony.

She glanced round her quarters, silent and shadowy in the flickering light, with the white mosquito nets of the bed moving in a ghost-like manner. A couple of lizards chased each other up a white-washed wall all patched and stained with damp and mildew; out from a cobweb over the dressing-table a huge spider looked at her intently; from one of the corners came the sound of some rodent scratching. There was an empty, deserted look about the room with its stretch of bare boards and silently swaying draperies. All sound outside had died away. The quick fall of darkness had caused a momentary lull; the daylight noises were hushed, the night ones not yet started. The soft wind brought the moan of the distant surf, the pad of naked feet, and an occasional chatter in a wild, uncouth tongue.

A sense of isolation seized the girl; a sudden realization that she really knew nothing of the place or the man she was going to; a great wonder at her own daring in coming alone to such a land. A little shiver followed, and a hope that all would be well. Just then all nomad instincts were swamped by feminine fear of the unknown closing in so stealthily around her.

Then from outside came the sound of civilized footsteps, and a murmur of English voices, bringing a sense of security.

When Dorothy returned to the balcony she found Ashby standing by a little table set for two. The sound of her approach made him turn, regarding her with an air of covert approval.

"I took the liberty of ordering dinner out here, Miss Gale," he said, drawing up a chair for her. "I thought you'd rather have it here than in the dining-room; that's always so close." Then, seating himself and picking up the menu, he continued, "I can't speak highly of the catering in this part of the world. We live principally on 'tins.' However, tonight there's fish caught in the bay this afternoon, and frozen beef from your steamer. Take my advice and stick to those; you'll have enough of tinned food at Alondi. There's nothing else to be had there except goat, and a very occasional and very tough fowl."

To Dorothy the meal proved the most pleasant within her experience. Her life, up to her mother's death, had been one of almost convent-like seclusion; poverty had cut her off from people of her own status; care of her mother had left her very little time to devote to learning as a means of getting back to her own sphere, as in the case of her sisters. She was not accustomed to have any one anxious and solicitous of her wants and welfare; so far life had demanded her thought and care for others, and had meted out to her very scant measure in return. Now a man's hand had lifted the burden of things from

her shoulders, temporarily, leaving her mind free to receive the impression of himself.

When the meal was finished Ashby took her to a lounge, installing her there comfortably with cushions, such magazines as the hotel boasted, and a box of chocolates.

"Now I'll go and fetch my sister," he said, when her well-being was assured.

When he left, the beauty of the night swamped all the misgivings the Mussatti manager's neglect had roused. A faintly silvered sea stretched away to an indigo sky; above was an arch of softest purple velvet with a myriad of flashing stars; over the black line of the forest a crescent moon hung in a blur of gold. A light wind whispered down from the unknown, bringing all the wild bush sounds—strange wails and sighs and calls. A bat flitted out from the purple into the lighted veranda, circled round once or twice, and was lost again in the shadows. A night-moth drifted up from the darkness like a tiny white ghost, to be lost almost before it was seen. From somewhere came the beat of a tom-tom, echoing through the living night with the steady throb of a giant pulse.

A woman's voice and the swish of silken draperies roused the dreamer.

Dorothy looked round with a quick start, to see a handsome and rather hot-looking woman bearing down on her, whom she guessed to be her self-appointed guardian's sister.

Lilian Ashby did not wait for any introduction.

"I can see Frank has made me out to be a perfect ogress," she said smilingly. "I'd rather have one

woman in Alondi I could associate with than twenty new men. Yet I'm going to be dreadfully jealous of you; you've the sort of complexion that won't get hot and greasy in this awful climate."

Dorothy did not quite know what to say. The reception was so different from what she had expected.

The newcomer seated herself, glancing up at her brother with some amusement.

"You go away and leave Miss Gale to me," she said.

It was not long before Lilian knew most of her companion's previous history, and the reason that had brought her out to Africa, giving, however, very little information concerning herself in return.

When Ashby returned, Dorothy got up, tired out with a series of new experiences. She wished the two good-night, and went along to her room. The man's gaze followed her until she disappeared behind the curtains.

"Well what do you think of her?" he asked.

"She ought to suit 'The Reformer,'" his sister replied. "She has no more knowledge of the world than the average child of ten, and there's not a spark of original sin in her—the very woman he lost a fortune looking for. She won't have been out here many weeks before he's head over ears in love with her."

Ashby said nothing, but drew a cigarette from his case and tapped it on the verandah rail with evident self-satisfaction.

CHAPTER VII

The railway station presented a very busy scene early the next morning, when Dorothy, under Ashby's escort, arrived there to start the journey up-country.

The place was a chattering hubbub of natives; picturesquely-clad negro trading women in brilliant-hued cotton gowns, with gaudy handkerchiefs on their heads, and a profusion of roughly-made gold jewelry about their persons; Mohammedans from the hinterland, in flowing white robes and snowy turbans; a witch-doctor, naked but for a girdle of dried reptiles and a necklace of human teeth, with a mummified finger or so as a special charm. There were men from the Hausa country, in loin-cloths and huge straw hats the size of umbrellas; hulking black laborers going up to railhead; scantily clad country folk and naked little children—all talking at the top of their voices and in a variety of dialects.

Whilst Ashby went for her ticket, Dorothy watched them with a smile that included everybody, delighted with the strange life around her—all misgivings about her post at Alondi forgotten.

Ashby's return brought her mind back to earth—to uneasy speculations concerning Harrison, and a wish that her present guardian were traveling up-country with her. None of her fears were shown in her manner as she sauntered towards the train by

the latter's side, he pointing out objects of interest on the way.

The train consisted of four trucks loaded with machinery, timber, corrugated iron, and stores of all kinds in huge wooden crates, over which scores of negro passengers were fighting and scrambling for seats. There was one carriage reserved for Europeans; to this she was taken. Although it was marked "First Class," the seats were wooden and the windows mostly broken.

"I had a 'chop-box' sent down from the hotel," Ashby said, as she seated herself, glancing at a luncheon hamper reposing in one corner of the compartment. "There are no refreshment-rooms *en route*. Now, if you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll go and see if there's any one going up as far as Alondi, so that you won't feel too much alone in a strange land."

When he left, she stayed meditating on his thoughtfulness, watching the moving, jabbering crowd—the novelty of her surroundings more than counterbalancing the discomforts of accommodation.

English voices roused her. One was Ashby's, the other had a rasping Cockney twang. With her guardian was a youth of about eighteen, pale and stunted, with a sprinkling of pimples on his sallow face. He was attired in a none too clean suit of white drill and a dirty panama hat, and looked the reverse of comfortable, as if highly conscious of his own shortcomings.

"This," said Ashby, " is the only representative of our nation going as far as Alondi. He's known

as 'Kippers.' If you get him full face you'll see he does resemble a split herring. His real name is Green—the only part of him that is. His social status is that of a junior assistant at Macqueen & Acram's store."

Dorothy hardly knew how to take this introduction; however, she gave her hand to Mr. Green and said she was pleased to meet him. He shook hands with a sheepish grin, then sat down, lapsing into silence, watching her covertly as she talked with Ashby.

When the train started she turned to the boy.

"Have you been out here very long?" she asked.

"Six months on the 26th," he answered promptly; "two and a half years still before I get a sight of civilization."

His voice left no doubt as to his opinion of the land in which fate and circumstances had placed him.

After one or two futile attempts at conversation, her attention went from him to the forest into which the train had plunged. On either side was a wall of vegetation—a tangle of strange and curious trees so grown and matted together that it was impossible to see more than a few yards into it. Occasionally there was an opening—a stretch of black swamp, arched with greenery so thick that the sun could not trickle through—a sombre, ghostly passage that went on, with snake-like creepers writhing about its side, to be lost in deep gray gloom. Now and again there was a clearing with fluttering bamboos and plantains, banks of gorgeous flowers, and a cluster of mud huts under palm trees. A foul yellow river was crossed, with thick muddy water oozing slowly

between slimy banks, where gaunt unwholesome mangroves squatted with their white bony roots clawing into the festering mud, and their dingy green leaves hanging limp and listless in the tropical heat.

Each whistle of the engine was followed by the sight of a string of black figures—men, women, and children—with huge calabashes of produce on their heads, lined up by the side of the permanent way, waiting for the train to pass before they resumed their journey—the line being used as a high road between the scattered villages.

The train went on very leisurely, occasionally preceded for some distance by herds of goats. The first station was reached. Without any apology or explanation, Dorothy's new guardian left the compartment. Conversation had been very strained and stilted since leaving the terminus. She had a feeling the situation had been forced on him and he had seized this opportunity to escape.

However, she was mistaken. He returned within a few minutes, bringing a calabash full of fruit, which was deposited beside her.

"I thought you might like a bit of fruit," he said bashfully.

She thanked him, searching round her head for a topic of mutual interest.

"Is Mr. Ashby connected with the mines?" she asked eventually.

Green looked at her, amazed at the extent of her ignorance.

"Ashby! He's the commissioner!"

This was news to her—an item that had not come into her dealings with the Ashbys. The knowledge

resulted in a curious mingling of pleasure and dismay at the thought that the man who had taken the burden of herself upon him was the head of the district into which she was going.

"Ashby," the youngster went on, now a topic had been found to his liking, "he isn't like your boss. He's a good sort, is Ashby. Makes allowances for a chap; don't expect him to toe the line chronically, with a thermometer at 105 in the shade. Your boss and Ashby don't hit it. Ain't likely either. Ashby's a gentleman, second cousin to a duke. Harrison started life hawking fish round London on a barrow. When his firm wrote and said you were coming, he kicked up no end of a shindy. Cabled to England countermanding the order."

It was a moment or so before Dorothy grasped his meaning.

"You mean Mr. Harrison didn't want me?"

"You bet! Said he'd put up with a dozen Brookses rather than have the worry of one woman."

As the train rolled on, into her astonished ears was poured the story of Brooks' drinking propensities, how he had nearly poisoned him (Green); how Harrison had written demanding an efficient doctor, and the firm had compromised by sending her; how the manager had cabled refusing this addition to his staff, and the company had stuck to their decision.

It seemed to Dorothy she now had a reason for the Mussatti manager's neglect. Pride had kept her from mentioning to her new friends that the firm had given her to understand he would be at the port to receive her. The uneasiness that had been

with her since the previous afternoon increased apace.

"Don't you fret," Green concluded, suddenly aware of the consternation his remarks had caused. "Alondi chucked its hat in the air and got drunk three nights running when it heard you were really coming."

This did not have the consoling effect it should have had.

Now the ice was broken, Green chatted on, giving all the gossip of Alondi—the strained relations between Government House and Harrison, and the latter's unpopularity.

A constant green forest slid by; but the charm had gone out of the scene for the girl, with a mind dwelling on the uncordial reception awaiting her in the new sphere she had set out for so joyfully, determined to fill to the best of her ability.

The sun poured down on the carriage, bringing a thirst that was well nigh unendurable. The boy advised an orange, which he peeled for her with fingers none too clean. Dorothy took it in the spirit it was given. He, at least, seemed pleased to have her. A huge mangrove fly buzzed into the compartment—one of the poisonous kind. Green flapped it down promptly, putting his foot on it with a sickening crunch, explaining, meanwhile, the reason of his action.

Lunch-time came—a meal they shared together. There followed a long stop at a station. Then the sweltering, broiling heat of tropical afternoon, when they each dozed in their respective corners.

At half-past three Green bestirred himself, informed her they were five miles from their destination, and suggested an orange in lieu of afternoon tea.

She was about to take one when a sudden jolt sent her flying across on to the boy opposite. There was a recoil that brought them both back into her corner, a heave up into the air, the rattle and crash of trucks, shouts and screams, a rending, plowing sound, the hiss of rushing steam, and then a stop.

Dorothy did not scream, but held her companion's arm in a tight, nervous clutch.

He smiled reassuringly.

"Don't you fret," he said; "it's nothing much. Only the train hopped off the line."

She thought of Ashby's teasing predictions, and how very quickly one of them had come to pass.

They scrambled from the carriage to find it off the rails, the engine and the first two trucks by the side of the permanent way.

"You wait here" the boy said: "I'll hop along and tot up the damage."

He returned with news to the effect that nothing had happened beyond a few niggers bruised.

"It'll be hours before they get a gang down here," he finished; "so we'll wait till the sun goes down a bit, then hop along on foot."

From among the débris jerked from the trucks he produced a couple of wooden cases which he set within the shade of the forest. When Dorothy was seated, he lighted a cigarette and whiled away the time by relating his experiences in similar train mis-

haps, incidentally giving her hints on three-card loo and poker, and several reliable cocktail recipes.

Five o'clock arrived before he deemed it cool enough for the journey to be started. They went along the line with a wall of forest on either side of them, the gleaming rails all that told of a civilized world. All the time a third pursued them with a persistency that made the girl turn. Following in her wake, with her dressing-bag on his woolly head, was Peter the Great. The sight made her mind swing back to Ashby, forgotten in a crowd of new experiences, bringing a sensation of relief at the recollection of who and what he was, and that he could be appealed to if the Mussatti manager proved too outrageous.

The sweltering heat made quick walking impossible. Half-past six found them still two miles from their destination. In the west the sun was sinking. Around was an endless sea of green, whispering gently in the rising night wind. Gradually the hard blue sky softened; stray fingers of colors stretched out across it, gold and red, barred and blurred and blended with carmine, amethyst, orange, and pink. Over the dark rim of the forest a fiery sun was plunging down into a bed of crimson. Soft clouds drifted over the treetops—faint mauve with a tinge of salmon—and were lost in the night mist rising like columns of golden smoke from all parts of the forest.

Dorothy watched with face aglow.

"Look!" she said.

Green's gaze wandered round aimlessly, eventually alighting on the sunset.

"That! Oh, yes, it's all right," he remarked casually.

She laughed in a way that made him look at her in astonishment.

"If you like that sort of thing," he volunteered, "you'll get loads of it out here. I'd give all the bloomin' sunsets in Alondi for one stroll in Hyde Park on a Sunday afternoon when the band's playing."

The longing and loneliness in the boy's tone made her sorry for him in spite of his non-appreciation of the natural beauties around them.

Gradually the color died away. A faint, weird greenness crept up, deepening and darkening to misty blue; then dense thick purple that brought a host of flashing stars.

A sudden silence fell on the land. There was a throb in the air as of a great heart beating, and the purr of the sleeping forest. With startling unexpectedness the hoot of an owl came echoing down the dark aisle they were following. The night awoke. Sighs and rustles and squeaks issued from the surrounding wilderness. Great bats circled in the gloaming. From the distance came the shrill wail of a bush cat; from above the beat of some night bird. A faint golden light tinged the velvet darkness, sketching the moving trees black against it. The track changed from purple to misty silver as the moon shone out, in a gleaming bow, over the edge of the rising night rack.

Dorothy went on in a dream—Mussatti all forgotten in the beauty and mystery of the tropic night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Mussatti manager lay stretched out on a cane lounge on the verandah of his bungalow; he lay at ease, his shirt sleeves, more or less, enveloped in a cloud of smoke that kept the importunate mosquito at bay. Alondi held more charms for him than for most whom fate stranded there; he could appreciate its scenic effects and spend his leisure hours in enjoyment of its beauty.

The golden bow of the moon hung over the trees fringing the mine. Its coming had dispelled the darkness and cast an indescribable charm, sweet and faint and shadowy, over the clearing just beneath him. Dainty silver fingers touched and frosted the seams and scars on the parched, disfigured hill, turning sand into snowdrifts, and covering rocks with rime, bringing an elusive sense of coolness. A few yellow specks dotted the misty purple of the valley, marking out the European residences. Above was the moan of the forest; below, the hoarse, wheezy voice of a gramophone raised in some once popular song, by now almost forgotten in England.

Presently the sound of footsteps reached him. He glanced along the verandah; Alondi was not in the habit of visiting him socially. Something floated up to him from the darkness of the stairway—a girl's face, faint and shadowy, with all the sweet, shy charm of the softly silvered scene.

For a moment he deemed it but a picture of his mind's conjuring. But it came on, quickly gaining flesh and blood, to be followed by another that was well known to him.

It is saying something for Mark Harrison's presence of mind that he managed to gain his feet and remove the pipe from his mouth before this vision reached the balcony. An Englishwoman was hardly what he had expected to see looming up out of African blackness.

After an hour's walk through a world that held no light save that of a young moon, the flare of the acetylene lamp on Harrison's verandah blurred Dorothy's vision. She paused at the head of the stairs, a figure of slender grace, bringing an air of refinement and gentleness.

It was a moment or so before Harrison recovered himself sufficiently to make a mental guess that this must be the nurse from England, arrived before he had received any definite date as to her coming. As a matter of fact, in the train, five miles away, was the firm's letter apprising him of the time of her arrival, which, by some oversight, had failed to catch the previous mail.

He stepped forward to apologize and explain. The movement brought Dorothy's eyes in his direction. She caught sight of a rough figure, in shirt and trousers only, approaching her, pipe in hand. She gazed at him as if petrified, the scene spinning around her, and the only tangible thing in it was a face with an ugly scar across the left cheek. The man she had known in the hospital as "Watson"!

The look of disbelief and amazement that was

cast at him made Harrison aware that his garb was not a fitting one in which to receive this new addition to his staff. Yet why it should offend so deeply he failed to see. The small pale face he was watching pictured a chaos of emotion, then grew hard and cold, with a scornful quiver about the nostrils, as though his very presence polluted the atmosphere.

He scanned her closely, wondering where he had seen her before; but he could not identify her with any one of the few women of her type who had come into his life. Her name—which might have given him a clue—was unknown to him: that, too, was in the letter five miles away.

Nurse Gale, in neat print frock, white cap and apron—an attire strongly resembling that of a betterclass servant—with hair brushed back in the plain, straight way the hospital desired, was very different from the girl facing him now—in soft gray muslin gown, flowing dust cloak, and wide drooping hat set on a halo of loosely dressed, pretty hair—with her look of breeding and distinction—items swamped in the hurry and bustle of hospital life.

Her sudden and seemingly unaccountable dislike to him, for the moment checked all apologies.

Green was the first to speak.

"Bloomin' train hopped off the line, so we walked the last five miles."

This roused Harrison.

"Won't you sit down?" he said to Dorothy, pulling out a chair.

The invitation was ignored. He watched her curiously, wondering at her strange manner, as he

explained that no news of the date of her arrival had been received, and tendered his apologies for not having been at the port to receive her.

"Won't you sit down?" he said again, when he had finished his explanation. "You must be dead tired after your long walk. I'll go and see about some dinner for you."

Dorothy's mind was whirling; her one desire was to get away.

"I'd rather go to the hospital at once," she replied.

"I'm afraid you can't do that. I wasn't expecting you before next week, and it'll take me all to-morrow to get the place ready. You'll have to stay with me until then."

A scared look came into her eyes.

"Is there no hotel I can go to?"

The look did not escape him. He accounted for it by his rough, unprepossessing appearance.

"The nearest is at the port you left this morning."

Dorothy's agitation increased. She gazed round at the thickening night. A rank mist was creeping slowly up from the valley. Out from it a few yellow lights twinkled. They brought an idea. She turned to Green with a little gesture that was pathetic in its silent appeal for help and protection.

"Is there nowhere I can stay?" she asked him.

"Nowhere, unless you like to stick up at our place," he responded; "though it ain't exactly the show for you."

"Oh, but I'd rather go there," she said, with relief.

Harrison's voice broke in with a note of iron

authority and a brusque harshness also, for her distrust of him was the reverse of complimentary.

"I can't let you go there."

She faced him haughtily.

"Why not?"

"Macqueen and Acram's store holds the biggest collection of rowdies in Alondi. Green can spend the night here if you wish, since you know him and I'm a stranger to you."

This reply told her that he had no recollection of her; that his desire to keep her rose from the simple reason that there was nowhere else she could go. A feeling of intense relief followed, and a hope that no remembrance of herself would come back to him. She knew she must endeavor to appear a little more cordial in her manner towards him, for fear of exciting his suspicions.

"Thank you," she said; "I've never been abroad before, and everything seems so different." Then, turning to the youngster, "you will stay, won't you?" she pleaded.

"Only too jolly pleased, Miss Gale."

The name made Harrison start. Her identity flashed on him all at once. Now he knew exactly why she seemed familiar!

The hard-working, flustered girl, in unbecoming hospital uniform, who had roused his amused contempt by her claim to well-placed relatives and seeming infatuation for himself, and who had appeared to him—with the ideas of his class as to what constitutes a lady—but little removed from an ordinary servant, bore but a wraith-like resemblance to the one with him, now raised back to her true

status by the grace and elegance of her attire. It dawned on him there had been a mistake somewhere. Her manner towards him during their second meeting in no way coincided with his first estimate of her. The brooch and caress he had bestowed upon her had not pleased her, as he had imagined they would. Her present manner said plainly that his conclusion had filled her with nothing but disgust and dismay.

It seemed to him fate had played him a scurvy trick in showing him how different a woman may look in another style of dress and under other circumstances; he cursed his own short-sightedness for having judged her by her clothes and occupation only. The thought seized him that her interest in him during hospital days in London had been caused by nothing more than pity for his poverty and friendless condition; the way in which she had given the money to him had been resorted to so that she would not have to run the gauntlet of his thanks.

As he watched her white, haughty face, the greatness of his former mistake was strong upon him, and he marveled at his own colossal stupidity in having fancied such a girl had fixed unsought affection on him.

He made a quick survey of the position—given now a reason for her fear, dislike, and desire to escape from him—and decided it would be better for them to start as strangers; no apology could redeem his previous behavior; to attempt an explanation might only add to the discomfort of her position.

He descended to facts suddenly, the only thing that appeared to be left for him to do.

"If you'll excuse me," he said, "I'll leave you in Green's care and go and see about your room, and order dinner for you; or perhaps you'd rather have tea?"

In spite of his efforts to appear at ease, Dorothy saw she had been recognized. This placed her beyond speech.

Green's voice broke the strained silence.

"I guess you'd rather have tea, wouldn't you, Miss Gale?"

"Yes, I think I would," she said with an effort.

As Harrison left them the youngster piloted her along to the dining-room. Even into his meager intelligence had penetrated the idea that something was amiss.

They entered a long, bare room, empty but for a table, a trio of chairs, and an undraped packing-case doing duty as sideboard—a sordid apartment, reeking of tobacco, without the least touch of refinement. To Dorothy it savored of the vulgarity of the man who was her chief. She did not know the firm had made the smallest possible allowance for the furnishing of her quarters, and that Harrison's bungalow had been stripped of almost all its contents in a hope of adding to her comfort. She only knew she wanted to be back in England, that lack of funds made her return impossible, and this man would have to be endured until her two years' agreement was completed.

She seated herself wearily, glad when the black servant entered with tea, as the meal took the youngster's attention from her.

"You're not eating anything," he remarked presently.

She took a piece of bread and butter to prevent further comment, and sat trying to think out rationally, the undreamed-of contingency; the fact of her position and the boy's inane chatter brought a racking headache, and reduced her to a state of quivering nerves.

Nearly half an hour elapsed before Harrison returned. His entry brought Dorothy's gaze to the door. There was a suspicion in her eyes and suppressed tiredness in her attitude. This he noted as he crossed the room, scanning her face furtively, seeing there traits not usually marked by the casual observer—inexperience, lack of stamina, and a pride that refused to acknowledge weakness. With her delicate features and graceful garb, she suggested all that was sweet and gentle and womanly. As the light of the moon had idealized the scars and disfigurements on the bare, parched hill that owed their origin to man's passion for gold, so her presence filled the room with its fragrance, bringing a sense of home and refinement into the sordid surroundings.

As Harrison looked at her, anger towards his firm filled him. He wondered why it could not have been as plain to them as to him that she was not built to stand the hardships and trying climate of Alondi. A dozen ways in which her path might be smoothed crossed his mind; a wish that they were really strangers, then his wide experience and friendly advice could have eased her position still

further. As it was, nothing that verged on intimacy would be allowed him.

He halted beside her—clumsy, awkward, and ill at ease.

"I expect you'd like to go to your room," he said stiffly.

Dorothy rose, glad of the proffered solitude. Green got up also, offering her his hand.

"You're tired after your long walk, aren't you?" he said soothingly. "You go to bed and sleep straight off, and don't fret. Alondi ain't quite so spooky by daylight."

This attempt at comfort brought a wavering smile. She bade him good-night, and passed from the room by Harrison's side. He made no attempt to break the silence until her bedroom was reached.

"This is your room, Miss Gale," he said, halting outside a draped doorway leading off the balcony. "I hope you'll excuse my rough hospitality for one night. To-morrow I'll have your bungalow ready."

She thanked him quietly.

There had been no casting of withering glances at him, no upward jerks of the chin; but the quiet scorn in her eyes and the dignity and aloofness of her manner made him feel utterly abject. He squirmed under the prospect of the future; his mind sought round wildly for some means of expiating his past error, for her good opinion seemed a most desirable thing.

When the curtains had fallen together behind her he returned to the dining-room.

"I say! Something seemed to have upset her," Green remarked at his entry.

Harrison said nothing, but sat down heavily.

The youngster's voice ambled on in its tactless, gossipy way.

"She didn't cotton to you quite as much as she cottoned to Ashby. It ain't surprising, though! You came on her looking like a bloomin' navvy. Not at all the sort of boss she'd fancy having. Ashby found her stranded on the beach yesterday. Took charge of her for the rest of the day. Handed her over to me this morning. She and him get on fine. You and me are all right in our way, but we ain't exactly her style. She's jolly nice and smiling to me, but she wouldn't be, though, if I didn't mind my p's and q's."

Harrison got up abruptly; the youngster's remarks rubbed him on the raw. The stupid little Cockney, whom he despised, had seen at a glance what he, during a fortnight's association, had not had the wit to observe—that, with Miss Gale, such an indiscretion as the one he had assigned to her would be impossible.

He went on to the balcony, pacing up and down, trying to bring back every incident of their former experience of each other, forgotten until the girl had come upon him a second time and in such a different guise; and, as he recalled them, it seemed to him that he had had some data for his conclusion. He stayed, lost in contemplation, wondering why at the hospital she had acted in the manner she had. But the letter that might have given him some inkling was still going from place to place, trying to find a man who had left Australia more than seven years before.

CHAPTER IX

With a feeling of relief Dorothy gained her bedroom. Since she had become aware that her identity was known to Harrison, she had dreaded he would make some reference to their previous acquaintance. That he had not done so, but appeared as anxious to avoid the subject as she, eased the weight of fear that coming across him so unexpectedly had caused. At the moment of their meeting only his final behavior had been in her mind. Since then other thoughts had entered.

She had often wondered why no answer had come from the owner of that letter. Now an explanation had been given. That Watson and Mark Harrison might be one and the same person had not occurred to her; nor did she realize, even now, that the letter might not have reached him. Her only thought was —he esteemed her so lightly that he had not bothered to write and inquire how the letter had come into her possession, or even thanked her for the trouble she had taken. That brief, appalling interview in the British Museum came back to her mind, bringing more acutely than ever a sense of shame and degradation, making her break down entirely and weep at the thought of such a man—a stoker—imagining she could be in love with him.

During their walk along the veranda she had tried to gather together sufficient moral courage to explain the whole affair. Then the fact that he was

not one of her own class, and that she could give no reason that he could understand for acting in the way she had done, prevented any satisfactory explanation being possible.

The tears were dried at length. She glanced round her room; at the bare, boarded floor, and the shiny pitch-pine walls that gleamed damply in the candle-light. It was empty but for a camp-bed draped with mosquito curtains, a skeleton wash-stand and a wicker chair. There was a marked odor of tobacco about it, and a look that said she was the first woman to be accommodated there.

The dim, bare room, with its shrouded corners, and vague shadows that crept stealthily along the sweating walls at her every movement, brought the same sense of fear and isolation that had assailed her the evening before. The moist, heavy heat seemed to have pressed almost all sound out of the night, leaving only darkness, damp, and mystery. There was only an occasional faint scratch of palm fronds along the corrugated iron roof, the ping of mosquitoes, and heavy, clumsy footsteps pacing up and down the balcony.

A very washed-out, tired looking girl appeared on Harrison's balcony the next morning. Green's ugly face greeted her as she came out from her room.

"Harrison won't be back for breakfast," he said, after making inquiries as to how she had slept. "Said I was to excuse him. He's busy up at your place. Wants to get you in to-day."

The news gave her a feeling of relief.

When the meal was over the youngster departed

to the sphere that claimed him. Dorothy sat out on the verandah, limp with the unaccustomed heat, thinking of what her journey's end had brought, with eyes straying listlessly over the surrounding scene.

Beneath, a sandy hill stretched down to a stifling valley, where the tin roofs of the residences flashed like flaming furnaces in the fierce heat; above were wooded heights, a line of undulating emerald green backed by a sapphire sky, all flooded with the blazing gold of a tropic sun.

The morning passed. Lunch-time came, but no sign of Harrison beyond an apology for absence, delivered by a black servant. Tea-time still found her alone. The lingering fear that he might take advantage of her position evaporated somewhat. He seemed as anxious to avoid her as she him. The comforting discovery reconciled her a little to the turn of events. Then into her mind flashed the thought that Mr. Harrison—considering his capacity for putting a wrong construction on her actions—might fancy she had tracked him out to Africa purposely.

The mere suggestion of such a thing left her horrified. For some minutes she sat thinking out every point connected with themselves and the Mussatti Company. Common sense said such a conclusion was impossible; yet the idea persisted, bringing her to the verge of tears.

As she was thinking over this last suggestion of her own mind, a square, white-clad figure emerged from a path running through the trees to the left—

a steep, wooded incline leading up to the highest point in the vicinity of the mine.

Although she had never seen Harrison in so respectable a garb before, Dorothy knew him at once. She watched him cross the cleared space with face growing gradually more cold and haughty. If he ever contemplated apologies for his previous conduct, the look that greeted him as he came along the veranda would have frozen any such speech.

He halted beside her, hat in hand.

"If you're ready, Miss Gale, I'll take you to the hospital now," was all he said after greeting her.

Silence enveloped them as they walked towards her new home, which was screened from the mine by the forest. Dorothy's mind was so full of her latest idea to note the beauty of the track they followed. Around was green shade forked with amber where the sun pierced the roof of vegetation. The red sand path zig-zagged through the forest, going upwards at a stiff incline. One side was a mass of tangled undergrowth, the other, jagged rock grown over the moss and ferns and flowering creepers. At intervals festoons of orchids were stretched from tree to tree across the track—fluttering bands of color that wound on through the forest until greenness swallowed them.

A remark from her companion brought her attention back to the thing of the moment.

"That's the hospital, Miss Gale. It's the only place about here at all suitable. I'm sorry nothing better can be provided at present."

Her eyes went to a clearing some twenty yards ahead, a square patch in the forest abutting on a

steep, straight precipice. A long low building met her gaze, running parallel with the cliff, palm-thatched and built on piles, with walls of split bamboo filed in with red clay, and big square hole in lieu of windows. In front of it was a wide, covered veranda, jutting over the cliff, with a drapery of greenery, spangled with purple, hanging like a curtain from the rail. Another great, trailing, flaring passion-flower coiled round the rough tree trunks supporting the roof, and disappeared in a blur of color over the gable. A group of palms arched the stairway leading to the balcony. Behind, the forest stretched away to meet the sky; in front, a sheer drop into the valley. There was a look of cool airiness about the place, sadly lacking on the sun-parched hill of Mussatti, with its group of scintillating, iron-clad dwellings.

Dorothy forgot everything except that this bungalow was to be her very own. All the voyage out she had hoped not to be provided with one of the corrugated iron atrocities civilisation dumps down in such places. This exceeded her wildest expectations—an enlargement of the mud and palm thatched dwellings indigenous to the soil.

She quickened her pace and gained the balcony, glancing over the rail. No sign of the mine or the ravages of the gold industry, only a depth of deep cool green.

Her eyes came from there to a trio of black men-servants, barefooted and attired in white cotton shirts and short blue knickers, and from them to a young negress of about seventeen, in a mauve and yellow slip, a scarlet handkerchief about her head,

round gold discs hanging from her ears, and a green glass necklace round her plump bare throat.

Harrison's voice broke in on her delight.

"I've written to the firm to try and get a proper hospital sent out and put up on this site, and to do away with this old bungalow."

Dorothy looked at it all with a pleased smile that included the view, the bungalow, the row of black servants—everything but the man standing beside her, worried and anxious, inwardly cursing a set of directors for sending a woman out to his care without allowing him sufficient means to provide what he considered suitable accommodation for her.

Dorothy's eyes reached him at last, and the smile departed from them. If he had expected grumblings and comments on the ramshackle appearance of the place, none were forthcoming.

"I'm quite content with the accommodation they've provided," she said coldly.

He said no more on the matter, but suggested a tour of the premises.

Opening out on the veranda, at the end nearest the steps, was a combined ward and dispensary: a big bare room with an unplaned floor, rough wooden walls, a corrugated iron ceiling, and four square holes for windows; a series of drug shelves and a cupboard comprised one end. There were three camp-beds, a military washstand, a couple of deck chairs, a small deal table, and a newly arrived packing-case full of hospital utensils.

Dorothy gazed round with inward dismay—everything was very different from the neat, well-stocked wards to which she had been accustomed. There was

a draughty look about the place that did not argue well for the patients.

Harrison knew just how much the present ward differed from those of the hospital where she had had her training. He stood waiting for some disparaging remark. Dorothy had the instincts of the pioneer beneath her gentle surface; she could adapt her needs to the circumstances. The Mussattî manager was forgotten as she mentally rearranged the beds, and saw how it was possible, with the aid of sliding shutters and screens, to fix these so that no direct draught fell on them. The corrugated iron ceiling, although annoying to the artistic sense, effectually prevented any wet that might leak through the thatch from entering.

"If I might have one or two screens," she said, when the survey was completed; "and if you could make sliding shutters to the windows so that the ventilation could be regulated, this could be made passably comfortable."

He was relieved to find that her demands were practical.

They passed out to the balcony again, and along to her private quarters—a bedroom and a sitting-room that formed the other half of the building. The sitting-room delighted her. It was a long, low place running the width of the bungalow, with one square window hole at the back, two other windows and a door to the front. The rough wooden walls were covered with a collection of native curios—quaintly carved paddles, roughly beaten brass trays, and calabashes in wild designs. A long three-tiered dinner-wagon in unpolished, carved mahogany stood

against one wall, acting as sideboard, a monk's bench to match was placed beneath the back window, and in the middle of the room was a small square table. There were several wicker chairs filled with gaudy cushions, a cane lounge, and two quaintly shaped stools of native manufacture holding palms in rude clay jars. The doors and windows were draped with brightly embroidered cloths, the work of the country. On the floor were mats of curiously plaited green and brown rushes. In at the back window an exquisite spray of passion-flower was peeping.

She went through the room with undisguised pleasure and looked out of the back window. Just below was a small compound, verging on the forest, with a cluster of little brown huts—the servants' quarters—and a tin-roofed shed that was obviously the kitchen.

Dorothy liked the room. It did not strike her to consider how the things got there, or who was responsible for their arrangement. It was Harrison's own room carted piecemeal up to the premises he had converted into the hospital, the dull red mahogany furniture all his own making and carving. His present dining-room represented the company's allowance for her.

As he watched her unfeigned delight a glow of pleasure stole over him—the happy knowledge of efforts appreciated. A recollection came to him that their last meeting in England had been in a section of the British Museum devoted to a collection of curios depicting life in parts of the world that did not appeal to the majority of women. The memory brought a feeling of tastes in common.

His voice roused her as she stood gazing out at the forest, not a stone's throw away.

"The girl you saw outside is your assistant," he said. "I got her from a mission at the port, with an excellent character. She and Peter are the only ones on the premises you'll have to keep in order. The men I'll see to."

These remarks roused all Dorothy's pride. They seemed to say he deemed her incapable of running her own establishment.

"I think I shall be able to manage my own servants, thank you," she replied, with considerable dignity.

For the first time since their unexpected meeting a vestige of amusement flitted over his face. His eyes went to a hand resting on the window edge—small and white and well-shaped in spite of evidence of hard usage—a hand that suggested gentleness but not strength, very different from his own.

"I've dealt with the semi-civilized black for a number of years in various parts of the world," he responded; "it requires a firm hand to keep him in the narrow path of civility and obedience. You'd be wiser to leave the men to me. They'd understand my manner of speaking perhaps better than yours."

"I think it's better not to have outside interference in hospital affairs," she said very decidedly.

The shadow of amusement on Harrison's face deepened into a smile.

"Very well," he said, "I'll leave them to you."

Then he continued what was evidently a planned speech, in a manner very well known to those within

his jurisdiction, in no way perturbed by her non-acquiescence to the opening clauses.

"Every morning," he went on, "you must send down to me for the list of stores you require for the day—for yourself and the hospital, that is; the servants cater for themselves. Anything you fancy I'll do my best to get, but Alondi's not London. Dr. Brooks will on no account be allowed on hospital premises except when there's a patient here, and then only under my supervision. All prescriptions he issues you are to dispense, and if you think there are any errors in them hand them on to me. If he should come here in a private capacity let me know, because I've forbidden him to do so."

These last remarks filled her with angry astonishment and a feeling that his estimate of her was of the very lowest.

"You mean the doctor is not allowed to come here except with you?"

"That's exactly what I mean. But you may have any one else you wish."

Dorothy was too fresh from the hospital to let this slight on her medical chief pass unchallenged.

"Then why not Dr. Brooks?"

The reply had some of the crude bluntness of "The Reformer's" everyday language.

"For the simple reason he's drunk and incapable six days out of seven, not fit society for a pig much less a lady."

Her anger collapsed. She saw she had attached a wrong motive to his speech. From Green she had heard of the doctor's drinking propensities, which, however, the youngster had made very light of, and

she had taken for little more than gossip, having remarked at once his tendency to exaggeration.

In a rather subdued manner she led the way back to the balcony. Harrison said nothing more until the stairway was reached; then he paused, touching a bell suspended from the rafters.

"If anything happens to alarm you, ring that. The mine quarters are not a hundred yards away, and one of us will come at once."

With a few further instructions he left. As he did so Dorothy turned to make another survey of her premises, very glad that he had gone.

CHAPTER X

THE Mussatti hospital had been occupied a fortnight before the Ashbys came back to their district. The morning following their return to Alondi a couple of figures were strolling up and down the wide veranda of Government House, awaiting the sounding of the luncheon bell; one was the commissioner, the other the chief of the police, a tall, grave-eyed man of about thirty-four.

The ringing of the bell sent them to the dining-room, into which Lilian came rustling.

"Well, Captain Vickers, what do you think of our new importation?" she asked after greeting him.

"She seems very quiet and reserved."

"Which means, I suppose, she doesn't flirt," she responded, seating herself. "From what I saw of Miss Gale, it's the country she's come to see—the men in it are a very minor consideration."

"One succeeded in impressing her," Vickers replied. "Ashby, you stand in high favor."

The commissioner looked up from the prawns in aspic he was serving.

"What did she have to say about me?" he asked, with slight interest.

"Overpoweringly grateful for all you did when she was stranded at the port. What on earth made her come out here? She couldn't have chosen a place much more devoid of what women consider makes life worth living."

"It was anywhere to get abroad," Lilian responded, "and this was the first post that offered itself. She's got the travel microbe very lively in her blood. Her father was Professor Gale, the famous explorer and authority on things connected with out-of-the-way places. She gets her 'wanderlust' from him. We of Alondi would prefer something a little less out of the way."

"I'll give you another who wouldn't," Vickers corrected; "'The Reformer.'"

A momentary silence fell on the table, leaving the captain with the feeling that an undesirable subject had been broached. Vickers, although he had been only a month in Alondi, had an acquaintance with the Ashby's dating from some years before their meeting there. He, also, had noticed the strained relations between Government House and the Mussatti manager; the circumstances, considering what he had culled of Harrison's history, and an item of almost forgotten gossip he had once heard in connection with Lilian Ashby, led him to conclude the three had met before.

There had once been some tale about her and a man of the mushroom millionaire variety. A marriage had been arranged between them, then broken off, and the man had disappeared into the obscurity he sprang from. Gossip declared he had cancelled the engagement; her people had said otherwise.

Ashby's voice broke the slightly strained silence.

"How does Miss Gale get on with him?"

"I've never seen them together," Vickers answered; "but young Kippers—Green, whatever his name is—who haunts the hospital and whose gossip I've had

perforce to listen to once or twice lately, says, 'Miss Gale don't like him. Made no bones about it straight off. There was enough ice in her voice when she spoke to him to provide Alondi with cold storage for a year.' "

Lilian smiled in a manner that had more amusement in it than a mere quotation from Green appeared to merit.

"And Harrison? How does he get on with her?" she asked.

"If I may quote my authority again, 'He worries his bloomin' self no end about her. Thinks she ain't strong enough to be out here.' According to Kippers, Miss Gale spends all her time in the dispensary, bandaging up any nigger who comes along, making up doses for all who care to apply for them. She's an unsuspecting little lady, very easily imposed upon. The result is, the niggers are taking her in all round, and she's working herself at a too high pressure for the climate."

"If 'The Reformer' attended to his own business, instead of poking his nose into other people's concerns, he'd see for himself she was overdoing it," Ashby interrupted.

"Harrison will put a stop to it, doubtless," Vickers replied. "He's a good sport in spite of his rough exterior. Just what was wanted on the Mussatti. The very best man for his job."

His hostess laughed a trifle maliciously, as if to hear Harrison appreciated was galling.

"How pleased he'd be to hear you praising him, Captain Vickers."

"Not he! More likely to punch my head on suspicion that I was trifling with Miss Gale."

The remark appeared to amuse the commissioner. Although the conversation drifted off into other channels, a smile lingered on his face.

When luncheon was over the two men went back to the balcony; Lilian to the seclusion of her bedroom, where she scribbled a note before retiring for the usual midday siesta.

A little time before tea she appeared on the balcony where her brother and his guest were dozing. Her eyes went first to the blazing sun-scorched hill of Mussatti, and from there to the little green nest above, where a long, low, brown-thatched bungalow, now the hospital, showed.

Then she turned to the sleepers.

"Frank, I want you to take this note to Miss Gale. I've asked her to lunch to-morrow."

Ashby got up lazily.

Vickers surveyed him speculatively.

"Tell Miss Gale I'm coming round to-night," he said, "to make up pills or wash out bottles, or do any little odd jobs she can find to keep me out of mischief."

The commissioner promised to do as requested.

Two pairs of eyes watched his length of handsome figure as he sauntered along the balcony, down the steps, to be lost eventually in the tree-shaded path leading down to the valley and Mussatti.

CHAPTER XI

Dorothy did not take kindly to the tinned food of Alondi; her appetite, never very keen, needed tempting in a climate so hot that even eating savored of exertion. She had tried, each in succession, for a week of breakfasts, tinned haddock, kippers, herrings in tomato sauce, bacon, corned beef, tongue, and galantine of chicken. They had all tasted of the metal, emerging from their tins in an oily, unappetizing mess, owing to the heat of their surroundings. Cold storage in Alondi was unknown. Lunch and dinner brought the same tinned monotony. Butter, preserves, the main supply of milk and vegetables and cakes came from tins also, though the last named did not acquire the metallic flavor.

By the end of a week Dorothy's diet had been reduced to tea, bread-and-butter, cake and fruit.

Nor was this the only drawback she endured in silence. Each night brought an overwhelming sense of fear at the thought of her complete isolation from all of her own color. Added to this, Harrison's prophecy concerning her staff had become a fact. Tired of the sameness of the first week of breakfasts, she had ordered banana fritters; they had appeared with the combined flavors of haddock, kippers, bacon and goat chops. This had led to an inspection of the kitchen premises and the state of the frying-pan.

The kitchen is as sacred to the African cook as to the English one. Dorothy had suggested a daily

cleansing of utensils in a manner too mild for negro comprehension. The black authority had given her to understand he preferred doing things his way. She had reasoned with him from a point of hygiene; her vocabulary was not one calculated to pierce his hide; he had sat on an empty biscuit tin and smoked, ignoring her entirely. She had retired vanquished, and disobedience spread.

There was a worried expression on Dorothy's face early one morning as she sat, in hospital uniform, by the back window of her sitting-room. She had been up all night with a patient from the Jhuna mine, a bad enteric; at the crisis Brooks had been too intoxicated to attend, and she had had to pull through alone. With daylight her early morning tea had arrived with a flavor that said the last day's leaves had been left in the pot; second breakfast was equally unpalatable. Between the meals she had rested, leaving the negro girl in charge of the patient. Before retiring to her room she had given instructions to the junior "houseboy" to sweep the ward balcony—duties he had neglected to perform the previous day, and she had been too much occupied with the case to note—and no attention had been paid to her order.

She glanced into the compound. Outside the cook-house three figures were basking in the sun, smoking short clay pipes as if the day's work were done. Dorothy thought of her unswept ward and balcony, of the pots and pans in the kitchen, of all Harrison had said, and made another bid for authority.

She rang the bell. It had no effect on the smokers. She rang again. A black figure bestirred

itself slightly, then sank back in an attitude of ease. Again the bell rang out, longer and with greater vigor. One of the three detached himself from the group, sauntered lazily across the compound, and was lost around the corner of the bungalow leading towards the balcony steps.

Presently a woolly head loomed up between the curtains screening the doorway.

"Lib for ring, Ma?"

"I rang three times, Copper," Dorothy said severely.

"No catch him, Ma."

She knew this to be false. However, it was allowed to pass, for she did not know how to cope with the grinning, unabashed mass of black confronting her.

"Why haven't you swept the ward and balcony?"

This accusation of duties neglected brought no touch of remorse, only an increased smile, complacent and obliging.

"Copper lib for sweep him one time, Ma."

"Very well. Don't let me have to speak to you about these things again."

The man departed. Dorothy went to her bedroom to bathe and dress herself before the arrival of Brooks and Harrison. During the fortnight she had been in Alondi she had made it a point of never appearing before the latter in hospital uniform. So attired, in the days of their former acquaintance, he had seen her do all manner of things suggestive of the housemaid with whom he had evidently classed her—such as dusting, sweeping, the polishing of furniture, and the carrying about of trays and meals.

She desired that no picture of herself as in former days should come before him; so clad, she would not be able to acquire the dignity she wished to possess when with him.

By the time she returned to the balcony, although it was barely eight o'clock, on the steps were seated a dozen or so natives from the villages around, desirous of free advice and medicine.

One glance along the veranda assured her that it had not been swept. She went into the ward, that also was untouched. She looked out of one of the back windows. Copper asleep in the sun. The combination almost moved her to tears. There was no getting away from the fact that the ruling of adult black labor was beyond her capabilities. All her pride rebelled at the idea of appealing to Harrison; yet she could not possibly manage the hospital if things were not done at set hours.

His voice roused her, talking in the Fanti dialect and in a tone of iron authority to the natives clustered about the steps. Brooks entered the ward. He was more wine-hued than usual, smelling strongly of some pick-me-up, and his hands trembling. Mentally she contrasted him with the men of her London hospital. A feeling of disgust stole over her. She omitted any reference to his non-appearance in the night. Usually she treated him with a brisk friendliness; but the fact of his having been intoxicated at the hour of a crisis he had predicted, swamped all the pity that his obviously incurable vice had roused.

He crossed to her side and stood regarding the patient.

"So you've pulled him through, Nurse. Lucky devil to have you to look after him!"

There was a familiarity about his mode of address that might have been caused by the lingering fumes of the spirit or by Harrison's temporary absence. She ignored it, and made some very professional remark about the patient.

The examination started, and her comments adhered strictly to the case. When it was finished, Brooks showed no inclination to go, but stood regarding her with a leer.

"If you've finished the examination, Dr. Brooks, I won't detain you any longer."

This did not move him.

"You needn't cut up so huffy because I didn't turn up last night," he said, looking towards the door to make sure Harrison was not within earshot.

Dorothy led the way out of the ward. On reaching the balcony, she saw, to her surprise, that the steps were cleared of all but one of the natives collected there. Harrison stood, square and solid, with an air of fixed determination. He noted at once, with a perception the staff had grown to dread, the deep dark rings under her eyes and the tired droop dignity could not quite take from her shoulders. Previously he had remarked that the litter of leaves, flower petals, and crumbs on the balcony was the same that had been there yesterday and the day before.

She greeted him in the chilly way he knew very well by now.

During the course of her two weeks in residence they had not met more than half a dozen times, four

of these since the patient had been in the hospital. Harrison had never been accommodated with a seat on her premises. What he had to say she listened to standing, thereby intimating she desired his quick departure.

In a very cursory manner he dismissed Brooks and turned to Dorothy, who was regarding him with some surprise, wondering why he should stay instead of going with the doctor as was his wont. With a discouraging air she waited for him to speak.

"With one exception, Miss Gale, all that crowd of niggers on your stairs had nothing the matter with them that they need apply to you for. If you're foolish enough to bandage up every cut and scratch for them, and give them doses for the asking, they're only too pleased to let you do it."

"But I thought I was to attend to all who came to the dispensary?"

"Nineteen out of twenty of the niggers who come here have practically nothing the matter with them, nor are they in any way connected with the mines. From to-day none are to come without applying to me first, and if I consider you can do any good, I'll give them a written permit and send them here. And I must ask you not to give out any drugs or liniments except to such as I think fit."

This suggestion of a rebuke left Dorothy inwardly shrinking, dreading further reproof. She tried to find some reason for Harrison's proceeding, and eventually saw it on the score of expense. The drugs she had been doling out so freely were the company's property, not hers to do with as she

wished. The knowledge of an error in herself always reduced her to humility.

"I'm sorry I've been extravagant," she said quietly.

This left him nonpulsed. He had no wish for her to feel censured, yet this appeared to be all she had made out of his speech. He had cherished a hope that she would see it in the right light—a desire on his part not to let her goodness and charity be imposed upon at the expense of her health.

There was a moment's pause, broken by the girl in the manner he knew was reserved for him.

"Is there anything else in connection with the hospital you wish to say?"

There was a note in her voice which said, if he had not would he please be gone.

A smile hovered round his mouth, but there was remarkably little mirth in it.

"Yes, I've another complaint to make, not on the score of extravagance this time. I want to know what you live on; for the lists of stores you've sent down to me this week have had nothing on them to make you an adequate lunch or dinner, or even a passable breakfast."

"I don't think that is a matter we need to go into."

"I disagree with you, Miss Gale. You were sent out to my care. The firm pare down their expenses to the smallest possible point. The tinned stuff they send us is of the poorest and cheapest, and I can quite understand your not taking to it; but you're not bound down to our fare. More dainty stuff is shipped out for the Government servants.

I'll send down to the port and see if I can get a consignment for you, put up in glass if possible."

It was almost as if Mark Harrison were making a bid for popularity. However, it failed. Dorothy's response was more distant and chilly than ever.

"There's not the least need to put the firm to extra expense on my account."

"The Reformer's" supply of society language gave out suddenly.

"Damn the firm! They'd no business to send you out here without letting you know exactly what you were coming to. You're not made of cast-iron. You can't stomach the tack they send us men. In future I'll get what I think fit, and if you don't eat it I'll ship you back to England at my own expense."

This outburst left Dorothy aghast. So vigorous a mode of expression had not come into her life heretofore. The look of horrified amazement that was cast at him told him of his momentary lapse into rather forcible speech almost before he realized it himself. The knowledge of his error stilled his tongue. It seemed he was fated to offend. He glanced along the untidy veranda and changed the subject.

"Have you any complaints to make about the servants?"

Just then Dorothy would have endured discomfort for ever rather than admit the true state of affairs.

"They're quite satisfactory, thank you."

The reply, which he knew was not altogether true, chased a little of the gloom from his face. However, he said nothing, but left the balcony.

She went into her sitting-room and sat there trying to gather her scattered faculties together.

All at once from the back came sounds of commotion. Harrison's voice was raised in a flow of language such as she had never heard before. She looked out of the back window to see him, frying-pan in one hand, the black cook by the scruff of the neck in the other. Close by, the two "houseboys" were rubbing their heads as if they pained them. She looked away again very quickly, knowing what chaos must have been revealed to the manager.

The disturbance died away. Dorothy sat in a state of quivering suspense, with rather fearsome eyes fixed on the door, momentarily expecting to hear Harrison's step along the veranda, and see him enter and accuse her of having spoken falsely concerning her household.

Time passed, but nothing happened; only the insects buzzed on contentedly.

Presently she looked out of the back window. In the sunshine of the compound the black authority squatted in an attitude of humiliation, with a saucer of sand on one side of him and a heap of rags on the other; around were all the pots and pans from the kitchen; at one of these he scrubbed as if his soul's future well-being depended on its cleanliness. There was no sign of the "houseboys." She went out on the balcony and found them working as they had never worked in all her experience of them.

She looked for some signs of Harrison. On a narrow red path through the forest, leading to the Ashranhi mine, a broad, white-clad figure was pursuing its way.

That the hand of "The Reformer" had fallen on her premises was very evident. During the morning not a single native appeared for advice or assistance. Lunch was served with unusual promptness, bringing an omelet that was the first edible thing the kitchen had produced within the week.

With dread Dorothy contemplated her next meeting with her chief, wondering what would be said to her then. His action in going round to her kitchen premises proved that her statement had not been believed. Not only had he discovered that she was incapable of running her own establishment but he would think she had descended to falsehood in order to hide her own shortcomings.

All morning this view remained before her.

The wholesale sweeping of the clamoring natives from her premises, gave her the hours between lunch and tea in which to get a little sleep to prepare her for the night's work, for the condition of the Jhuna patient was still too critical for him to be left for very long in unskilled hands.

At four o'clock she was up and out again, ready for the night's duties. She sat out on the balcony with attention divided between tea and a treatise on enteric; for Brooks' behavior of the night before had shown her he was not be relied on in an hour of need.

It was not often that Dorothy was called upon to partake of this meal alone. In Alondi she was looked upon as a public possession, and not passed by because she was incapable of thrusting herself forward. During her stay in the place she had made the acquaintance of most of the Englishmen there,

every one of whom had quickly given her to understand that, although a privilege, it was their right to receive a cup of tea from her hands. The majority she made very welcome, glad that hers was the power to ease the monotony of their round a little.

The sound of a European footstep on the stairs made her look up from her book, thinking it was one of her acquaintances.

As her gaze fell on the visitor, her pallor changed to faint pink. She knew the commissioner was in residence again, but had not expected a visit from him until she had done her duty and paid her respects at Government House.

She got up in a quick, nervous way, the book on tropical diseases falling to the ground. His unexpected visit brought back all her shyness, and left her for the moment tongue-tied.

Ashby noticed the flush and temporary embarrassment.

"Don't say you've forgotten me, Miss Gale?" he said reproachfully.

"Oh, no!" came out hurriedly and emphatically. The straight, matter-of-fact answer made him smile.

"You didn't expect me to stand on ceremony, did you? I'm your oldest friend out here, you know."

She looked at him gratefully.

"I don't know what I should have done without you that day. Won't you sit down and let me give you some tea this time?"

With alacrity Ashby accepted her invitation. During the meal he entertained her with anecdotes and reminiscences of the wild country in which they were placed, that she undoubtedly found pleasure in;

he, having been nearly three years there, was able to give information on almost any matter connected with the neighborhood.

The time passed with surprising quickness. Ashby stayed nearly an hour, and, when he arose to leave, produced his sister's note.

Disappointment crossed Dorothy's face as she read it.

"I couldn't come to-morrow," she said. "I've a bad case here that I can't leave for very long."

"In the ordinary course of things he'd be left to the tender mercies of niggers."

"Perhaps; but I'm here now to prevent that."

Ashby laughed.

"You mustn't take life too seriously, Miss Gale. However, I won't try and entice you away if you think you ought to stay. Tell me what day you could leave with an easy conscience."

"Not before Sunday, and then only if the case goes on improving."

"Sunday, then; and I'll come and show you the way, which my sister hopes you'll use just when you feel inclined."

"It's very kind of you both to bother so much about me."

"You forget you're my salvage. Now, I really must be off. Don't do too much. No one expects it of you out here," he said, as the balcony steps were reached.

Dorothy watched him go, glad her rescuer was back in Alondi.

For the rest of the day the household wheels ran

with unusual smoothness, bringing into her heart a little unwilling gratitude towards Harrison.

After dinner she sat sewing on the balcony, watching the twinkling lights of the settlement; one, especially, that shone in remote glory from the highest point of the surrounding country.

The sound of some one coming up the pathway leading to her residence, roused her.

Presently Vickers loomed into the lamplight.

"I've come to do my share of the work," he said, seating himself beside her.

She looked at him with eyes that had a suggestion of injured feelings in them.

"I shan't require any help in future. Mr. Harrison has forbidden anyone to come to the dispensary without his permission."

There was a note in her voice which said this decree had not pleased, also it told of her aversion to the one who had issued it.

This Vickers noted at once. (It was the first time the name of the Mussatti manager had come up between them.)

"Quite right too, Miss Gale," he replied. "Most of the dispensary crowd were imposing on your good nature. I'd have opened your eyes very soon if Harrison hadn't."

The reply was a surprise to one in quest of sympathy.

"I thought it was because of the expense!"

"Not it! Brooks wasted more drugs in a day than you use in a week. Harrison saw you were overworking yourself in an unworthy cause. You don't know the natives as well as he does. They'll feign

symptoms for the sake of getting white man's medicine."

This version of Harrison's proceedings left Dorothy quiet for a time.

Presently she looked at her companion with a retrospective smile.

"I can't quite understand why Mr. Ashby said 'Heaven forbid!' when I asked him if he were the Mussatti manager."

This result of the silent workings of her mind brought Vickers' eyes on her thoughtfully.

"Harrison certainly is a rather rough customer," he replied. "He's knocked about a lot and risen a considerable distance from where fate originally placed him. He never apes the gentleman—a rôle he has sense enough to see he couldn't carry off—but he's a remarkably good specimen of the British pioneer."

This unexpected appreciation of an unpopular character left Dorothy silent. She said no more on the matter, but continued her sewing.

By her side Vickers sat talking of the subject next his heart—the girl in England he was engaged to, who had all the gentle, trusting charm of his hostess.

Dorothy's artless nature had been very quickly revealed to him. There was one impression on her mind that, for her future happiness, he wished to obliterate; he endeavored to do so by bringing before her notice a character more worthy of her inspection. Unfortunately for his good intentions he did not know of her former acquaintance with Mark Harrison.

CHAPTER XII

Sunday morning saw Dorothy in a flutter of excitement, and Peter with orders to lay out her best frocks. She had four very pretty gowns in her wardrobe, presented to her by her sisters before she left England. They were spread out on the bed in soft billowy folds of lavender, pale green, shell-pink, and cream, with hats, gloves, veils, and parasols to match, and over them the attendant black sprite lingered, fingering the muslin and silk with the air of a connoisseur.

Dorothy's entrance caused him to withdraw. When he had gone she set about her toilet with an air of latent gaiety.

The last few days had been the most pleasant, so far, of her time in Alondi. Since his first visit the commissioner had called again; her patient was out of danger; she was getting used to the rough ways and lack of ceremony of the place; the men-servants obeyed her with a promptness that told of a sturdy power behind her mild requests. Harrison she had not come in contact with since that day of reckoning. Brooks' condition had been such as to render him unfit for hospital visits, and the manager had shown no inclination to come alone, or to bring her to book for having tried to deceive him concerning the state of her household.

However, Harrison and all connected with him

had no place in her mind as she contemplated her frocks, deciding finally in favor of the lavender.

A voice, that drifted in from the balcony, told of Ashby's arrival before Peter's black face peered in at the window and announced officially: "Massa Ashby lib, Ma."

She surveyed herself with a feeling of unusual satisfaction, drew on a pair of long lavender gloves, slipped on her wrist an old-fashioned gold bracelet with an amethyst clasp, fastened a tiny brooch to match at the throat of her collarless gown, and, picking up her sunshade, went out.

Ashby's eyes rested on her with complacent appreciation, as she came from the cool shadow of the sitting-room into the glare of the morning sun. He greeted her in a manner of one sure of being welcome.

"I've got a name for you now," he said. "I've wanted one ever since I found you. 'Sweet Lavender' henceforth I'll call you."

The faint pink tinge he had noticed once or twice before mounted to her face. His speech left her tongue-tied, disconcerted by his familiar tone, yet not wanting to show, by prudish resentment, how unaccustomed she was to gallantry and flattery, unable to carry off the situation lightly, yet aware that a compliment was out of place from one who was almost a stranger. Dorothy's face reflected most of what passed in her mind; this Ashby read very easily, and it told him what course to take with her. Before she had recovered from her embarrassment, he spoke again.

"Are you sure you feel quite equal to walking,

Miss Gale? If not, I can easily get a hammock. We've a good mile to go, uphill most of the way—a consideration in this climate."

She was glad that he did not repeat the name he had given her, yet sorry to lose the pleasant feeling the admiration in his voice had roused.

During her time in Alondi, Dorothy had been too busy to do more than explore the immediate precincts of the mine, so she insisted on walking.

The road to Government House brought back all the delight that had been hers during the night walk up to Alondi, intensified by an appreciative companion, with a voice and manner that did not grate on her susceptibilities.

They followed a narrow lane leading down a steep hillside. A brook ran down the middle, its silver stream broken up into miniature waterfalls and tiny pools by scattered rocks and boulders covered with moss and maidenhair ferns. At the sides grew tall grass and gaudy flowering shrubs; behind these were towering trees, the spreading branches forming a welcome shade.

The path went on, with only one spot to mar its beauty—a little clearing in the forest that on first inspection appeared to be a rubbish heap grown over with weeds, but, on approach, took shape in an array of small mounds and a collection of nameless wooden crosses at all angles and in all stages of decay, set in a wilderness of coarse grass and creepers, without wall or rail to divide it from the track they were following—the European cemetery.

The valley was reached eventually; there the brook joined another and became a wide, shallow stream

with no visible means of crossing beyond the rough round trunk of a tree, all very well for unshod feet, but to Dorothy it presented a difficulty—the high heels and pointed toes of a small pair of tan shoes did not seem exactly the best things with which to get a grip on such a surface.

However, she had no desire to be seen nopulsed in any situation that arose in the land of her choice, and she started across it without comment, but with many inward misgivings.

Ashby splashed quickly into the stream beside her, ankle deep in water.

"Put your hand on my shoulder," he said authoritatively, "or you'll be slipping."

His action drew her attention from her precarious route. The consequence was a side-slip which, but for an arm coming deftly about her waist, would have resulted in a wetting. The embarrassment of the encircling arm made her lose her balance entirely. He caught her quickly, with the result that the journey across was finished in his arms.

Dorothy was deposited on the other side in a state of quivering nerves and confusion, very conscious of the amused face that had been so close to hers during the greater portion of the crossing, and in a state of anxiety about the wet condition of his feet.

"Why didn't you keep to the bridge?" she asked.

"I couldn't let you risk slipping in and spoiling your pretty frock, could I?"

"But you may get fever through splashing about in the wet."

"If I do I'll call on you to nurse me," he said carelessly. "You'll soon get used to these bridges and

be able to cross them without assistance. Lilian can, and she's not nearly so light and agile as you."

They went on slowly. Ashby's hand was quick to move away every twig and bramble that came in his companion's way. The world was a place of delight to the girl, filled as she was with the beauty of the walk and the thoughtful care of her escort—as new to her as her surroundings.

He was standing over her, disentangling the end of her veil from the spikes of a thorny creeper, when Harrison loomed up along an adjacent side track leading from the Jhuna mine. The latter had a vision of them both set in a bower of greenery; a man's face—handsome, teasing, and tender—close to a small pale one with an air of almost nun-like innocence, the two joined by a wreathing mist of lavender.

Ashby saw him before Dorothy did, and acknowledged his greeting very curtly. The action drew her gaze in that direction, and she gave him the smallest of bows. Evidently Harrison was expected to pass on, for they granted him no further notice. The veil was disentangled by the time he reached them. They were about to resume their journey when his voice made Dorothy pause.

"Miss Gale, may I speak to you a moment?"

She faced round, regarding him disdainfully, wondering why he had taken it upon himself to accost her when he had been shown quite plainly such a course was not desired.

On Harrison's first view of her a soft dreamy light was in her eyes, an expression that had been there on the night she had come upon him so unexpectedly out of African darkness—a look that worry and

responsibility drove away, that made him see why she had appeared so different in London days. The mind behind such eyes was not a place for harassing cares. With her slight figure and sensitive face she did not look fashioned for responsibility.

This was in his thoughts as he looked at her. He paused a moment before stating the reason for his interruption.

His hesitation made her address him very impatiently.

"What do you wish to say, Mr. Harrison?"

"There's a bad malaria coming from Jhuna," he answered quietly. "Due at the hospital in about an hour."

This item of news was not what she had expected —hospital and all connected with it had no place in her thoughts just then. It left her divided between duty and inclination. She had been looking forward to this break in the round, yet conscience told her what ought to be done.

"Then I must go back and get things ready."

The disappointment in her voice was unmistakable.

"Nonsense!" Ashby broke in. "I'll see you're back in a couple of hours. It's more than likely the case won't be there before then."

Dorothy knew the possibility of this. Her first patient had been timed to arrive at eleven, and had not come until two.

She glanced at Harrison, hoping he would corroborate this statement and leave her with an easy conscience to her morning's enjoyment.

As he made no comment, Ashby addressed him again very sharply.

"If the case should come in before Miss Gale's return there are enough of you on the mine to attend to it."

Harrison looked at him in a manner difficult to analyze.

"If Miss Gale wishes I shall be pleased to look after things until her return," he replied.

This answer stifled everything in Dorothy but a desire not to be beholden to him.

"I shouldn't think of troubling you," she said hastily. Then, turning to Ashby, "Will you excuse me to your sister and tell her why I couldn't come, and how sorry I am?" she added gently.

"You're not going back?"

"I must, if you don't mind. And you mustn't come either, because of your wet feet."

Ashby pleaded. Dorothy stuck to her decision. They both ignored Harrison, with the fine disregard of the well-bred for their social inferiors.

"If you feel you ought, then I must let you," Ashby said at last. "And if you really don't wish it, I won't come with you."

Then he took her outstretched hand, watching her with an expression of fond friendliness.

"Good-by, 'Sweet Lavender.' "

Dorothy turned her face homewards. It never even occurred to her that Harrison might accompany her, that her path might be his also.

Yet this came to pass.

Innate politeness prevented her from being so markedly rude as to ignore him for a distance of nearly three-quarters of a mile. She broke the silence within the first fifty yards by making some

inquiry about the incoming patient, but in a very different voice from the one that had argued so pleasantly with Ashby.

He answered her quietly, and showed no inclination to stray beyond the limits of her question. The new patient and a few commonplaces formed their conversation as the walk continued. Brambles caught in her skirt now and again. He would have removed them, but in these matters he was neither so quick nor so deft as her late companion; her hands were always there before his, and in a way that implied his very touch was defiling. If he had any hope of helping her over the bridge he was disappointed. She faced it without a quiver, and dignity took her over without a slip.

Those who knew Harrison would have been surprised at the lamb-like away in which he put up with the superior manner she assumed when with him, when once or twice already he had witnessed her incompetency, which he might have referred to had he wished to humiliate her. What she meted out to him he felt he deserved; the desire to retaliate was not in him.

The hospital hove into sight at last, bringing Dorothy a sigh of relief.

At the bottom of the steps he paused.

"You'll have to manage entirely without Brooks, Miss Gale. He's been drinking heavily all week and is an absolute maniac now. If I can be of any assistance, let me know. I've had, perhaps, more experience of malaria than you."

With that he lifted his hat and left her.

CHAPTER XIII

Night had fallen on Alondi. Only two lights showed up in all the settlement—both on the Mussatti Hill. One came from the manager's bungalow, the other from the hospital balcony.

By a bed in the big, dark ward Dorothy was sitting; the little round ring of light from the shaded night-lamp on a small table beside her falling on her tired, anxious face. The burden of responsibility lay very heavy on her just then, as she sat with a book on malaria open on her knee, with eyes and ears ready for the last sign of change or movement in her patient.

The day had been a very trying one. As Ashby had predicted, the case had not arrived until nearly three hours after her return, in no way improved by the shaking of the journey and a deluge of rain that had come on during transit. He had been delivered into her hands in an almost dying condition—a boy of not more than twenty. Everything had to be done on her own initiative; the case was the first of the kind she had had to deal with.

Anxiety swamped most of the nervousness that the night always brought when darkness conjured up the knowledge of her complete isolation, a fact sunshine blotted out. The ward became a place of beckoning shadows that chased her in a stealthy noiseless way if she dared move beyond the precincts of the night-lamp.

From the windows looking on to the balcony two golden bars were cast from the lamp outside, making two round yellow pools in the middle of the floor; another streamed in at the door; in between was darkness, with deep indigo patches marking the site of some piece of furniture. Black night stared in from the square holes at the back. The breath of the forest came in a constant wave of sound, rising and falling as the wind stirred the trees, from a sighing whisper to a wailing howl.

There was a leopard in the vicinity of the township just then, and its distant coughing roar reached the girl occasionally, as well as the vague murmur of small forest life, with its squeaks and calls and scratchings. The wind whistled in a mournful way in and around the big, draughty ward, making mysterious rustlings and flappings. Something crept with a soft, snake-like wriggle along the inside of the ceiling, and a spray of passion-flower tapped with gentle hesitation against the window ledge.

Dorothy's patient dozed off, leaving her free to listen to the wild sounds about her.

A huge flying beetle blundered in, and butted against the brass shade of the lamp with a noise and unexpectedness that made her jump. A rat skipped like a small gray ghost along the edge of one of the golden pools on the floor, paused there for a moment, watching her with bright beady eyes, then ran right into the light, sat up and washed his face vigorously, and scuttled away into the shadows. Behind her was the knawing of another.

She did not mind them; they brought a sense of homeliness into the whispering unknown around.

Out from the darkness a gigantic locust sprang, alighting on her book, making her drop it with a gasp of fear. The noise roused the boy, and he started raving feebly about scenes that were thousands of miles away.

Dorothy turned to him, mopping the moisture from his white, drawn face, and fanning him gently.

There was a sudden lull in the night. From the back came the long, hungry sniff of a pariah dog, and the rattle of tins as it nosed about in the rubbish-heap in the compound, the sibilant whisper of bamboos; the chirp of crickets in the cook-house; from the front, the snores of Peter asleep on the balcony and the rustle and scratch of leaves against the rail. Then the night moaned on again with its collection of wild sounds.

The boy dozed off. Dorothy went quietly across to the bed nearest the door, lamp in hand, glancing at her other patient, making no sound as she crossed, beyond the faint rustle of her starched print hospital frock. She was conscious of an access of nervousness that could not be lost even in strict adherence to duty, and tried to account for it by the fact that Death was very close just then, with bony hands outstretched ready to seize the boy she was guarding, if she made the least slip in her guidance out from the Valley of the Shadow.

She passed on to the door, standing there watching the night. The lamp on the balcony seemed unable to fight against a silent army of invading shadows. Around the stairway palm fronds hissed

and whispered as the light wind stirred them, making grotesque shapes flit in and out of the darkness beyond the steps. Up from the depths came the sigh of trees in the valley, with an occasional uneasy moan and rustle as if some gigantic creature were tossing there sleeplessly. The purple-spangled creeper draping the roof and rail had become a thing of writhing tendrils and suggestive whispers, that filled the air with beckoning fingers and ghostly voices. At the far end of the balcony Peter lay rolled up like a chrysalis in his rush-mat.

She went back to her patients, steadied a little by the sight of the sleeping negro, and sat by her new charge's bed, trying to lose herself in the treatise on malaria.

Something roused her. No fresh sound had come into the murmur of the wild, nothing moved in the ward: but an indescribable menace impressed itself on her being.

She glanced round nervously. A shadow fell across the bar of light streaming in at the window next the door, blotting out for a moment the golden pool on the floor. Her heart gave a choking throb, then went on again in quick jerks. She looked at the light, wondering what could have caused its momentary disappearance.

A low chuckle roused her. Her eyes went to the door and stayed there, wide and fixed with horror.

It was as if the forest had conjured up some satyr, that stood leering at her from the doorway. A thing wild-haired, with a bloated, swollen, unshaven face and bloodshot eyes, that muttered and chewed uncertainly.

She got up with a set, white face, and an air of authority.

"Dr. Brooks, please go and tell Mr. Harrison I want him."

The command was hard and stiff with fear, said in a wild hope that he would obey a direct order, as a mind in a state of insanity will occasionally.

A mad laugh answered her. His hands went to the pocket of his dirty, drink-stained pajamas, and a razor was brought out. A feeling of numbness wrapped around her so tightly that all power to scream or move was taken from her.

He came on, muttering under his breath, caressing the blade lovingly, to be merged in the darkness of the room.

Dorothy watched the moving shadow, expecting to see the shining steel fall on the throat of the patient asleep next the door. The maniac passed him by. In a spirit-maddened brain for five days her last cold reception of him had rankled. Instinct told her she was the one he wanted. The knowledge unfroze her faculties. She made a quick move across to the empty bed. He borne down on her. She had the advantage of knowing her ground, and escaped by a swift side movement that brought a table between them. Then a wild dash for the door.

As she gained the balcony a hand clutched her, tearing the cap from her head. A scream broke from her lips. She flew with bursting heart towards the steps, everything forgotten but the horror so close behind her.

There was a lull in the forest as her scream rang

out, cutting through the thick night with shrill sharpness.

A gust of wind caught the cry and carried it down the hillside, sending it with a faint human echo along the balcony of Harrison's bungalow. He was sitting up in case his advice should be called upon, with a mind obsessed by the tableau he had witnessed during the morning—until then he had had no idea that the girl who was his charge and the commissioner were on quite such friendly terms.

A feeble cry came sobbing up to him as he sat brooding on the matter, with a note in it not quite akin to the forest voices he was accustomed to. He took his pipe from his mouth, and stayed, intent and listening, waiting for some repetition of the sound. Nothing came. He tried to identify it with one of the myriad of bush calls, but could not with any satisfaction.

A feeling of uneasiness stole over him. He got up and turned the big acetylene lamp towards the path leading up to the hospital, so that all its crude brilliance shone in that direction. As he did so a sound reached him—the alarm bell of the hospital pealing frantically through the night.

Harrison's build was not that of a racer. In the ordinary course of things he was a slow-moving man. Yet he was down the steps and across the clearing and making up the hill at a pace that was amazing, considering his heavy make.

As he neared the steep path leading up to the hospital, the sound of feet coming down at break-neck speed reached him. A girl's face appeared in the faint light trickling through the trees, white and

agonized, with eyes fixed with terror; another close behind it, mad and bestial, so close that he doubted if he could reach her before the gleaming blade of the razor fell on her strained throat.

Something stumbled on to him, clutching him in a grip of frantic terror, with soft, heaving breast pressed close against him. He had no time to devote to her just then. She was thrown off very unceremoniously, with a gesture that sent her staggering for some distance, to collapse in a heap beyond the zone of danger.

Harrison was of considerably more than average strength, but the situation had been sprung on him with alarming unexpectedness, and his opponent was a tall man of heavy build, possessed of all the strength of madness.

For a moment it seemed as though the weight of the doctor would unfoot him. He was borne backwards to within a couple of yards of the girl before he regained his balance. There was the twinkling flash of steel as the blade of the razor was buried in his shoulder. A vicious snarl, as the pain of a twisted wrist made the fingers loose their hold of the weapon. They swayed to and fro on the steep, dark path, crashing again and again into the thick undergrowth, Harrison wrestling with cool strength, against a thing that attacked him tooth and nail. With a giant effort he loosed himself sufficiently to give his opponent a thundering blow under the jaw. The hands lost their grip of him, and a heavy heap slid to the ground.

Other faces loomed up through the darkness brought by the continuous tolling of the alarm-bell

The engineer and store clerk appeared. They were well aware who was at the bottom of the disturbance. The doctor shared their bungalow, and they were responsible for his safe keeping. They had retired, leaving him in the care of a couple of negroes, who must have dozed at their post. The extent of his mad escapade was not brought home to them till they saw the girl crouching on the ground, the open razor, and Harrison's condition.

The latter stood mopping his brow with the back of his hand. It would seem the woman was forgotten as he stood torn and bleeding, his shirt in rags, his massive chest heaving with the strain that had been upon him.

His eyes alighted on them with a fury of a roused bull.

"You damned pair of addle-headed fools!" greeted them, "weren't you told to keep that beast locked up?"

The engineer knelt by the silenced maniac, glad that his carelessness had not been the cause of any injury to the girl.

"I believe you've killed him!" he said, in an awed whisper.

"I hope to God I have!" came out in a slow, savage way. "Take the filthy corpse away, and, if there's any life in it, lock him in the engine-room."

He turned away from them, and went to the heap of crumpled lilac print crouched shivering against a tree.

"Come, little woman, there's no need to be afraid now."

Dorothy looked up. She heard a voice speaking

to her, but had no clear idea of what was said. The horror of what she had been through had temporarily paralyzed her brain.

Harrison saw she was beyond acting for herself. His arm went round her in a clumsy, unskilful manner as he helped her to her feet, holding her until quite sure she could stand alone.

The two other men came and spoke to her soothingly, but she seemed unaware of them, with eyes only for the heap on the ground.

Then her gaze went to Harrison, this time marking his torn shoulder. The nurse was there before the woman had unfrozen.

"I must bandage that," she said dazedly.

He smiled reassuringly, in fear of an outbreak of hysterics.

"Of course you must. Come back to the hospital and do it now."

His remark brought a recollection of her patients, and a vague wonder as to how they were faring. Mechanically she started back, her feet going very uncertainly, tripping as if she were not quite sure of them.

The hospital was reached. At the bell-rope, where he had been since Dorothy's scream awakened him, Peter still hung, with goggle eyes staring out into the darkness. The rest of the staff were congregated on the balcony, jabbering in a wild, excited manner.

A word from Harrison sent them back to their own premises very quickly.

Just then Dorothy's thoughts had got no farther than her patients. She entered the ward anxiously.

The weak voice of the convalescent reached her, demanding what had happened, making her put her own quivering, shaking self in the background in a desire to pacify him. She satisfied him with some plausible tale that was not alarming, shook up his pillows, and made him lie down again soothed and comforted. Then she crossed to take a look at the boy, who was moaning in the feeble, peevish way he had been when that horror entered the ward.

Harrison marveled at her cool, collected manner.

Presently she came back to where he was standing by the door, at the dispensary end of the ward, waiting to have his shoulder attended to. Putting the night-lamp on the table, she got out dressings and bandages.

Nothing was said as the supply was being collected together. Dorothy avoided his eyes. Just then the knowledge was very strong upon her that this man had not deserted her in her hour of need.

It was not until she actually touched him that the amount of frightened, trembling womanhood within her became known to him. Small, shaking, icy fingers washed his wounds with a gentleness that seemed almost incredible. The touch sent a shiver through him that had no bearing on their coldness.

The action made her glance at him anxiously; as she did so the movement brought one of the loosened strands of her hair sweeping across his cheek like a phantom caress, rousing into sudden flame the smoldering fire that her presence had grown to cause.

"Am I hurting you?" she asked.

Her voice had none of the chilly note in it usually reserved for him.

He laughed harshly. The picture of an elegant disdainful woman was before him. A savage desire to issue a decree that she was to wear nothing but the plain print frock and white apron of her present attire seized him. This did not set her quite so far above him. More acutely than ever came the searing sense of his early error and a desire to plead for forgiveness; to ask why, in their former experience of each other, she had acted in the way she had.

"You're not hurting me in the least," he said a trifle thickly.

Her eyes came to him with an expression in them that he knew would not have been there except that she owed her life to him.

"I'm afraid I am," she contradicted gently.

Then she made an effort to thank him.

Ashby's "Good-by, 'Sweet Lavender,' " was running like a refrain through his head, rankling by reason of its appropriateness. He cut her short in a very brusque, off-hand way that made her lapse back into silence, with hands trembling just a little more—a silence that remained unbroken until the bandaging was finished. Then she stood fidgeting with the scissors, watching him nervously.

It came out at last—a hesitating request that stuck in her throat, that only shattered nerves could have brought.

"I wonder if you would mind staying here for a little time. I don't at all like the idea of being quite alone."

Having to ask a favor of him brought a glint of

the old dislike to her eyes that, with the knowledge of her indebtedness to him before her, she tried to hide.

"I'd no intention of doing anything else," he said stiffly, noting her reluctant tone.

He turned away abruptly and went out on the balcony.

The night moaned on, bringing the feeble ravings of a delirious boy and, occasionally, the rustle of a starched print frock.

All at once a voice roused him.

"If you feel at all damp or chilly," it was saying, "please say, and I'll get you a rug."

He turned quickly, not knowing nearly an hour had passed since his abrupt departure from the ward. Dorothy's eyes were fixed on his torn cotton shirt, all that came between his shoulders and the dew-laden atmosphere.

"I'm not at all cold," he replied quietly.

The answer did not send her away.

There was a moment's silence, broken by the girl.

"Can I get you a book? Time seems so long when there's nothing to do; or perhaps you'd like to smoke?"

In his present irritable mood Harrison wanted the latter badly; also he wanted to torture himself by seeing what her idea of literature suitable for him would be.

"Are you sure it won't annoy you if I smoke?" he asked.

A wavering smile answered him. Dorothy had been reared in a houseful of women, in an atmosphere never polluted by tobacco; the odor, therefore was

offensive to her, more especially in the form of a pipe —the only thing Harrison smoked. However, she stifled her objection.

"No, I like it; it always brings a safe feeling."

The reply made him wince by reason of its note of forced friendliness. Harrison's feminine ideal was, perhaps, a trifle out of date. He objected to women who intruded into men's spheres—either in their attributes or in quest of a living—a trait common to men whose lives have been rough and sordid, who look to the opposite sex for what they have lost. Dorothy's gentleness, innocence, and implicit trust in humanity made a direct appeal to him. The wish for her good opinion, that had seized him on the night of her arrival in Alondi, had grown at an amazing pace with the passing weeks. A craving for her society was constantly with him; her companionship seemed the most desirable thing in the world; he felt she could supply all that was lacking in his life. There was a stubborn pride in him, a constant knowledge of his own shortcomings, that made him shun the society of his betters if there was the least suspicion of patronage or condescension in their manner, and if he felt their friendship was not sincere. The friendliness in Dorothy's voice rang anything but true. Under the circumstances he preferred her old manner; it was easier to bear.

"And I'd like a book too," he said, "if it's not troubling you too much."

She turned into the sitting-room. There was the scrape of a match, then a ray of candle-light went halting around the room.

He watched it with twisted lips. Evidently a

search was being made for something suitable for his status, apparently a difficult task.

He turned away, gazing gloomily out at the night, pushing tobacco viciously with a square-tipped finger into the bowl of a blackened pipe.

Dorothy's voice made him turn.

"I've brought this," she was saying.

He took the proffered book—a volume in a shabby leather cover that spoke of use before her day—and glanced at the title, wondering what interest the poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon, the poet of the wanderer and the wastrel, could have for her. He knew most of them by heart, had learnt them in early days in Australia, when he, too, in turn had been stock-rider, cattle-driver and, finally, with abnormal success, gold-miner.

He was glad she had not brought some semi-religious novel of the improving kind, such as he had expected.

"What made you choose this?" he asked.

Dorothy could have said that knowledge of his previous address had assisted her choice; however, such an explanation was impossible, she had no desire to refer in the least degree to a matter closed and sealed by silent and mutual consent.

"Because he was my father's favorite poet and mine also," she replied instead.

Again the feeling of tastes in common assailed him; and the maddening thought that, but for his previous behavior, it might have been possible to span the gulf between them without the bridge of gold by which such differences of birth are usually joined.

The idea left him tongue-tied; everything forgotten but his own early error, when contempt for the girl, whom he had imagined had fixed her affections on him, had blinded him to all else connected with her.

Dorothy watched him, as he stood silent and moody, wondering why he had not the politeness to thank her for the book she had brought, and in her heart was a great wish that it had been any one but Mr. Harrison to whom she was indebted.

She turned away without any further attempt at conversation.

As she disappeared, he drew up a chair to one of the little wicker tables and sat there smoking. The wreathing smoke took on a faint lavender tinge—a soft, cloudy veil, out from which a small face looked at him disdainfully. He put the pipe down to get rid of the mocking, mist-wreathed memory. Then phantom hands clutched him in a terror-stricken grip, and a soft, heaving breast was pressed against him. He got up to try and escape that. From the ward behind came the rustle of a frock and a girl's voice, sweet and low, speaking in gentle, soothing tones to a delirious, moaning boy.

CHAPTER XIV

Alondi had plenty to talk about the next day. By the middle of second breakfast the news of Brooks' escapade had reached Macqueen & Ancram's, brought there by Green, who had made an early morning call at the hospital.

Macqueen & Ancram's was a sordid-looking place, an oblong zinc block, like a huge tin box, with a gable and a balcony, set at the bottom of the valley, just behind the railway station, where it served the triple purposes of hotel, bar, and trading factory. The bottom story was saloon and store, above were a trio of sleeping apartments and a chamber called by courtesy "the dining-room"—a place with a long, narrow trestle table down the middle, a packing-case with a shelf knocked into it for a sideboard, half-a-dozen chairs, and a series of small woden boxes that did duty as seats when there was an extra influx of visitors.

Second breakfast was in full swing when Green entered. At the head of the table an assortment of flies buzzed round a shabby piece of tinned beef; at the bottom a similar thin, black cloud hovered over the remains of a strong-smelling haddock; in the middle was a dish of fruit; at intervals butter oozed greasily on cracked plates, and tins of marmalade trapped the unwary insect. A couple of blacks loafed round in dirty singlets and ragged trousers

pouring out a thick decoction that bore some resemblance to coffee.

The place was very full just then; the Sunday crowd, that had come down from railhead and the outlying stores, had not yet departed to the various spheres that claimed them during the week. There were fully a dozen men around the table, beside three of the four belonging to the store.

A little aloof from the rest Green sat, eyeing the table disdainfully. He had breakfasted nearly an hour before in a very different style up at the hospital, on anchovy toast, tongue of a quality not usual to the common fry of Alondi, and quince jelly —all set out on a spotless cloth with a vase of flowers in the middle, and an old-fashioned silver coffee-service that had come with Dorothy from England.

He was entertaining the company with all that had happened there in the night. Dickson, the store manager, appeared specially interested in the story; he leant back in his chair, a big, black-bearded man with watery eyes and a loose mouth, picking his teeth leisurely as he listened to a graphic description of the events of the night.

"Would have cut her throat," Green was saying, "if Harrison hadn't chipped in."

" 'The Reformer's' got a lift in favor then, at last," Dickson put in. "He's a fool to stand the cheek from her he does. There's no one in the place she considers her class except the Government lot, for all her soft, smiling ways with the rest of us. I'd soon take her pride down a peg or two if I had to deal with her, let her know what her job was, and

who was boss. Harrison's a rank idiot where she's concerned. Won't as much as let her name be mentioned. Threatened to ram my teeth down my throat for saying that if the girl had been consigned to me I'd have soon put her in her place."

"It don't take much to get his back up these days," the youngster went on. "He don't like it because she doesn't cotton to him. She's been scared to death up in that spooky place alone. Too bally proud to tell him. Nerves all in smithereens now. Asked me if I'd mind sleeping a night or so up there till she gets over this shock. Said I'd sleep there for ever if she wished. She froze on to the offer one time. Harrison wasn't any too pleased when I called in at his place and told him of our little arrangement. Wanted to know why she hadn't told him she was scared of being alone. Not wait for this to happen and then apply to yours truly. For all that, he said he'd fix a place up for me right away. That is, if you've no objection," he finished, looking at his chief sheepishly.

Dickson eyed him contemptuously.

"You're not as valuable as all that. If she wants you she's welcome, provided you turn up here to time. You're quite a Sunday-school boy now, never a drunk, clean suit, collar and cuffs, and scent every time we go up to the hospital."

A dull flush spread over the boy's face.

"Shut your jaw," he said inelegantly.

A laugh went round the table. Some one started whistling the refrain of "Love's Young Dream," which had the effect of making the junior assistant withdraw hastily.

He retired to the store below, to cut up little balls of rubber, that the natives brought in to exchange for tablets of highly-colored toilet soap, cheap scent, and other articles of a bright and useless nature, in order to see that the produce the unsophisticated savage tendered was solid all through, not a thin layer over a piece of wood or a pebble, as occasionally happened.

He was sitting on a tub by the counter, with a glitter of cheap and gaudy articles of European manufacture behind him and a crowd of clamoring savages in front of him, when the commissioner's voice broke in on his occupation.

"What's Brooks been doing now?" Ashby was asking. "I heard some jabber about him—trying to murder some one."

The situation was one to Green's liking. He had first-hand knowledge of what was buzzing in the air of Alondi, and gave it without loss of detail.

Ashby was used to the doctor's drunken escapades, but this was a surprise to him.

"You mean to say Harrison had no more sense than to leave him loose in that condition?"

"I don't know that Harrison lets him go loose exactly, but whoever had the keeping of him let him slip."

The commissioner left the store and turned his steps towards Mussatti Hill—a part he had never visited during Harrison's sojourn in Alondi until the past week.

The latter marked him as he sauntered into the clearing, and watched him, expecting to see him turn off at the track leading up to the hospital. To his

surprise the commissioner came straight on to where he was standing, just outside of the engine-house.

"What's this about Brooks?" Ashby said sharply on reaching him.

Harrison gave the gist of the matter quietly knowing it was within the other's rights to come and inquire into the case.

"However," he finished, "there's no fear of such a thing happening again. As soon as Brooks is in a condition to be moved, back he goes to England. Till then I'll see he's kept under lock and key."

With that he turned away and continued the instructions he had been giving when the commissioner addressed him.

Ashby surveyed his broad back, and the simplicity of his working attire—cotton shirt and khaki trousers held up by a leather belt—appeared to annoy him.

"The Mussatti people ought to have had more sense than send a lady out to you, if you've no more thought for her safety than to leave a drink-mad beast with an insufficient guard, knowing she's alone at the hospital," he said pointedly.

Harrison could have said that the tableau he had witnessed in the forest during the previous morning had filled his mind to the exclusion of all else. He knew he had omitted to go, as was his custom every evening, and see that Brooks was really in safe keeping.

He faced round, scanning his visitor from head to foot, noting every point of him—his handsome presence, air of cool assurance, spotless white, well-fitting attire, lavender cummerbund and tie, worn, as

he knew, in subtle compliment to the girl who was his, Harrison's, charge.

The sight sent a savage wave of jealousy coursing through him.

"You wouldn't dare start your old games on here, except that you've got Kingston's letter."

A little of the calm assurance died from the commissioner's face. For a moment surprise held him dumb. Then all his habitual arrogance returned as he faced Harrison coolly.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked.

"You know, damn you!"

Ashby laughed, just then the more self-possessed of the two.

"Indeed I don't. You must have been drinking, for you don't seem to know what you are talking about."

With that he sauntered away, not up to the hospital as had been his intention, but slowly down the hill, apparently lost in thought.

CHAPTER XV

Dorothy was not a regular church-goer; she only went when the problems of existence got beyond her simple mind. Somehow, during the course of her six weeks in Alondi, the thread of her life, that she had been winding so neatly in the straight course of her desire, had got caught and knotted again.

The last Sunday in October she took the tangled skein to the only church the place boasted and sat there thinking of the course of this entanglement.

Alondi church was an oblong structure of mud, with a zinc roof and yard-square holes in the white-washed walls for windows. The pastor was a negro, the assembly an assorted one. There were one or two black Government clerks in frock-coats and top hats; native women in long, loose, gaudy cotton smocks and a profusion of rough jewelry; negroes, old and young, in from the country sight-seeing, in loin-cloth only, their wives in a simple petticoat, their dusky offspring in a still more simple string of beads. The seating accommodation was very scant —a few forms for such as came early, but the majority occupied the floor.

Dorothy—the only white person there—sat watching the congregation as the service droned on, in pigeon English and Fanti, to the accompaniment of a wheezy harmonium, the quaintness of her surroundings easing the knawing ache at her heart—a

pain that could be accounted for in no other way save that early the following morning the commissioner would start for England on his annual leave.

She meditated on this fact as the service went on.

The atmosphere of the building was stifling. The tropical sun blazed down on the tin roof, making the interior like a furnace, drawing out more strongly than usual the pungent odor emitted by a negro crowd.

Her eyes left them and went to the window opposite. From there could be seen a group of palms; above, the deep blue of a blazing sky and an atmosphere that danced and scintillated.

The cool swish and murmur of the adjacent forest brought a desire for solitude. She got up and left the building, taking the first track that presented itself, wandering on in a mist of thought into the deep, green shade.

Around were columned aisles—an array of fern-grown boles and straight, tall trunks splashed with every color of the rainbow, stretching away until gloomy distance swallowed them; forest caverns, dim and shadowy, roofed with dense, tangled vegetation from which hung stalactites of massed and matted verdure, and clouds of red and mauve and orange blossoms, filled with a glow of green—gilded where the sun pierced the canopy of leaves—and a shimmer of darting, quivering, gauzy, gaudy insects. Peace and solitude reigned. The voice of God still seemed to be echoing through this wilderness. The incense of a cathedral filled the air; the constant hum of a myriad of insects had a sound like the faint notes of some distant organ.

Dorothy sat down on a fallen tree trunk. For a time all else was forgotten but the beauty and the sweetness of the scene.

She got up reluctantly, and retraced her steps to the valley and along the road leading to Mussatti. On reaching the hill the sound of someone behind broke in on her musings—a step she knew now, and dreaded slightly.

Dorothy never knew quite what to make of Harrison. She had not seen him more than half a dozen times since he had spent the night on her balcony.

Alondi said "The Reformer" was working even beyond the strength of his iron constitution. He seemed possessed of a demon for hard work, that kept him on the move from morning till night. Dickson had given his opinion on the subject of Mark Harrison's colossal energy and rather haggard appearance.

The latter certainly was thinner, and had a look in his eyes that had not been there before Dorothy Gale came to Alondi. She endeavored to discharge her debt to him by assuming a friendliness not altogether natural. Sometimes he met her with a moroseness that reduced her to silence; other times in the manner of an ordinary acquaintance.

The sound of his step made her turn to greet him. She had seen nothing of him for more than a week; the Ashranhi mine had claimed most of his time, owing to the sudden death of a couple of the white staff from the blackwater fever—both taken ill and dead before they could be removed to the hospital, where, owing to Brooks' summary dismissal,

she held the post of chief until a new doctor was sent out from England.

Dorothy was not in the habit of noticing Harrison's appearance; her one idea was to avoid him if it could be done without the fact becoming known to him. Just then, however, his worn expression was remarked.

"Why, you're looking almost ill," she said as he came up. "You've been doing too much work at Ashranhi. As chief medical officer I shall have to order you a holiday."

The remark was not received in the boorish manner some of her observations were. Perhaps the fact that it was spontaneous accounted for this.

"Shall we take the afternoon off together, then, Miss Gale?" he replied. "I'll get a pump trolley and take you up to Jhuna. You've not been there yet, and your old patients will be delighted to see you."

Dorothy had no intention of leaving the hospital that afternoon. Frank Ashby was coming for his last tea before leaving—a meal he had partaken of on her verandah very frequently during the past month, a fact that gossips had noted also.

"I can't this afternoon," she said; "but I'd be pleased to another day."

The first part of her reply was very definite, the second held the recollection of her debt to him. He lapsed into gloomy silence, Alondi gossip ringing in his ears.

She was relieved when the parting of ways came. Her further attempts at amicable conversation had

been received in the short, gruff way she was now accustomed to.

However, Harrison was forgotten some hours later, when the waning afternoon sun found her seated out on the balcony with Frank Ashby, pouring out tea for him with care as to size of sugar and proportion of milk that spoke of practice and thoughtful consideration.

Very little was said during the course of the meal, and that mostly by the commissioner. When tea was over they sat watching the sun sink slowly towards the valley. A great golden ball was plunging down into a bank of vivid rose; bars of yellow shot out across the sky, gilding the edge of the rising night-rack creeping up over the hills. The forest was sighing softly as the evening breeze murmured through it. Columns of mist rose up, curling lovingly round the tree-tops, wreathing them with a mass of fluffy pink.

For some time the two on the hospital balcony watched the banking of color in silence. Ashby got up suddenly, and stood by his companion's side, gazing at her tenderly.

"For the first time I find myself leaving Alondi reluctantly," he said. "And it's all your fault, Miss Gale. You've been so kind to a poor lost dog. Yet I expect the moment my back's turned you'll forget all about me in the crowd of others."

A little smile quivered on her face.

"That would be very mean of me, wouldn't it? You were my first friend here and—my best."

"Then now I can look forward to returning. I

didn't think you'd have a thought left for me, once I was out of the way."

"What made you think that?"

"Because I'm only 'that poor devil, Frank Ashby,' whom everybody is glad to be rid of."

Dorothy had not been six weeks in Alondi without hearing a little of the commissioner's history. Vague gossip had reached her about him; that he drank deeply at times; that his career had been a downward one, and his ducal cousin had dumped him in Alondi with a hope the climate would dispose of him. The narrow sphere in which she had been reared had not shown her that human nature can be as many-sided as a prism. She judged Ashby by the side he had been pleased to turn towards her, and it seemed to her the world had treated him very unfairly. All that reached her concerning him she put down as idle gossip, having quickly noted the scandal-mongering propensities of the place.

Her eyes met his with a sweetly serious expression.

"I'm very sorry you're going," she said simply.

The reply brought his face very close to hers.

"That's the sweetest thing I've heard for years. Now, take me to the end of the grove. I can't say good-by, here."

The sun had gone down by the time they reached the edge of the forest. A world of gleaming gold and glowing rose greeted them as they emerged.

Ashby halted, taking her hands in his, watching her earnestly.

"I wish I could say how much of all that's good you've brought into this lone mortal's life. You've

been my 'Shadow of a great rock in a desert.' Good-by, 'Sweet Lavender,' and—don't forget me."

He lifted her hands to his lips, kissed each of them in turn, held them for a moment clasped in his, gazing at her pleadingly, then dropped them gently and turned away quickly.

She watched him until he was lost in the thickening shade of the valley.

Twilight had fallen on Alondi. The rose and gold had gone from the world. Only the gray remained.

CHAPTER XVI

Umboo, the witch-doctor, squatted over the fire in his hut. He was never a very pretty picture, the Sassu villagers' spiritual head, with his emaciated form, matted white hair, and thick, livid mouth hanging loose and showing an array of broken, yellow fangs. Just then he was even more repulsive than usual, as he crouched, bespattered from head to foot with dried blood, with the entrails of a goat draped about his person, and claw-like fingers crooked over the flames.

He was an old man, his methods those of a past generation. The male inhabitants of Sassu had long since assigned him to the rubbish-heap; but he had managed to retain some standing with the women, who had not taken to new-fangled ways quite so readily as the men. Now a rival practitioner had arrived in the village—brought there by one who had had devils cast out by new methods—and was installed in Mayoba's hut with one of his patients. If this newcomer's medicine proved more efficacious than his, then his remaining shred of prestige would be gone.

Mayoba was a woman of some importance in the village, one of the wives of the headman. She had paid Umboo well for his services; but, during the twenty-four hours he had had charge of the case, things had gone from bad to worse. In spite of

sacrifices, incantations, and burnt-offerings, the evil spirit had not loosed its hold on the throat of her infant son. On the advice of her sister she had sought other aid. A report had just drifted into the witch-doctor that things were progressing more favorably under the spells of a strange woman than they had under his treatment.

Umboo brooded on the presence of the interloper as he glowered at the fire, and a little of its red flame took root in his bleared old eyes.

From the adjacent market square came the sounds of the merry-making that took place there every Saturday night, when such of the inhabitants as worked on the Mussatti mine, five miles away, returned with a good supply of gin, bought with their weekly wages. A huge column of yellow roared up against the forest, and showers of sparks drifted like gold dust across the blackness of the night. Wafted with the wind came the strains of a concertina, the jerky notes of a broken-winded cornet, the inevitable and monotonous tom-tom of a native drum, and the clapping of hands in concert.

The sounds of the savage revelry penetrated the brain of the witch-doctor. He got up and went from the hut, across the square where a dozen or so grinning figures were indulging in an uncouth dance; others squatted on their haunches, encouraging their comrades, with coarse jokes and laughter, to further writhings and contortions.

The village priest stalked by the merry-makers—they were wont to scoff at him with fine disregard of the devils of their religion, that had occupied much of their thoughts until they had come in con-

tact with white men—and on to a hut on the outskirts of the village, from which he had been summarily ejected not an hour before.

Around the door a crowd of half-naked women were gathered, watching interestedly all that was going on within. The appearance of Umboo made them draw back to allow him entry to the little dwelling. He went through them without a word, conscious of the whispers and titters that followed him, pausing when he reached the threshold, regarding his rival viciously.

The half-suppressed chorus of mocking laughter that his presence had roused brought a pair of gray eyes to the door.

Three hours before, as Dorothy was setting out for her customary afternoon walk, Peter as usual in attendance, a couple of native women had waylaid her just beyond the hospital precincts, one of whom she had recognized as an old patient. There had followed a frantic jabber, unintelligible to her, but, from the distress depicted on both faces, it was evident something serious was at the bottom of their harangue. With Peter's aid she had culled that they wanted her to come at once with them and see their sister's child that lay sick, with a devil in its throat, at a village some short distance away.

The desperate entreaty in the black hands plucking at her sleeves had made Dorothy forget everything but a desire to help if it lay within her power.

The village had proved to be much further away than she had been led to understand. Darkness had fallen before it was reached, bringing a quiver of nervous fear at the thought of the miles of forest

that lay between her and Alondi, and a recollection that both Ashby and Harrison had advised her not to go beyond the precincts of the settlement unescorted.

All this, however, had been forgotten as her guides led her to one of the principal huts in the place. She had entered to find it full of rasping, pungent smoke, emitted by some heathen decoction a shrivelled repulsive figure was burning over a small fire in the middle of the floor.

In the thick, foul-smelling atmosphere, that had tingled in her eyes and throat, she had noticed a young negress, picturesque in her flowing scarlet slip, with bare black arms and shoulders smothered in cheap glass beads, crouching, in an attitude of despair, over a tiny brown infant that fought valiantly, with sturdy, crumpled fists, for a life the local practitioner was doing his best to choke out.

Dorothy felt sure that the baby was suffering from bronchial pneumonia—a complaint she had dealt with very often in the days of her training.

With Peter as interpreter, backed by the woman who had been her patient, she had managed to get the hut clear of the smoke and atrocities with which Umboo was endeavoring to entice the evil spirit out from its present lair. He had retired with a scowl that had brought home to her the loneliness of her position. Then he, likewise, had been forgotten as she set about a treatment more in keeping with the illness.

Now, a big brass cauldron of water boiled and steamed over embers kept at a red, smokeless glow by the breath of the women anxious to assist. A soft, soothing moisture filled the hut, very different from

the acrid, choking dryness that had been there before; and by the side of the steaming vessel Mayoba stood, fanning the white, wreathing stream on to the mite that had coughed and choked on Dorothy's knee, watching her as, with the aid of a handkerchief and a feather, she removed the mass of loosened mucus each paroxysm brought.

She was too much occupied with the fight taking place on her knee to give much heed to her surroundings, as anxious as the other women that the baby's life should be saved. It was such a pretty little thing, a mite of soft brown velvet with bright blue eyes and loose black curls.

Umboo's reappearance took Dorothy's attention from her patient. Her eyes stayed on his repulsive figure for a moment, then went to the darkness that lay beyond the hut. Mingled with the whisper of the wilderness were the strains of the crude concert taking place in the market-square, and the sounds of coarse, unbridled laughter. The recollection of all the miles of forest that stood between her and Alondi made her feel uneasy.

Her gaze came back to the hut: it was full of the barbaric chatter of the women, their soft, stealthy movements, the bubble of boiling water and the crackle of red embers. Anxiously she scanned their faces; on them was none of the ill-will depicted so plainly on that of the man lowering at her from the doorway. The sight lifted some of the weight of uneasiness that her loneliness and Umboo's scowl had roused.

The old priest's reappearance had drawn Mayoba's attention to the door also.

"See, sisters," she jeered. "Here is Umboo, who, with the bowels of a goat, would choke the life out of a child."

A laugh greeted this sally.

The witch-doctor's lips curled back over his yellow fangs in the manner of a vicious cur as he sneered back at her.

"All Sassu knows why you are so anxious for its life. There will be no such child born to you again, Mayoba. It is Luba, Ambru's daughter, who has his favor now."

The negress gave a cluck of contempt.

"What of it! His eyes are restless as the wind. And the child is mine, with much cloth and gold for my man. Say, sisters, who filled my ears with all that would happen if I followed out your counsels? Who swore his magic to be of more avail than a woman's? Fool that I was to pay the price of two goats to a man who has no skill, when she works her spells for nothing. He has said so."

Here Mayoba pointed to Peter, who was leaning against the mud wall, watching the priest intently.

Umboo cast a vicious glance at his rival.

"She is a witch, and will bring evil on the village. It is not fit that women have men's knowledge."

With that he strode off, making for the square, unaware of a shadow that had stalked him from the hut.

He paused outside of the lighted area, watching them merry-makers speculatively. Around, the trees swayed black against the night, with an occasional towering giant with indistinct top like an anchored cloud up in the sky. A further supply of fuel had

just been heaped on the fire; a huge column of smoke and flame roared up against the darkness, sending a fitful yellow tinge to light up the gloomy caverns of the adjacent forest. The flare played on the hulking figures sporting about the square, bringing a blood-red gleam to their rolling eyes, and a savage glint to their strong, white teeth. They were very harmless in the ordinary course of things, these brawny laborers from the mines. Awe of the dominant race was very strong upon them. Six days out of seven there was no more vice in them than in a flock of sheep. But the seventh brought their weekly gin-drink, when very little would stir the dormant beast within them. This Umboo realized as he stayed watching them, brooding on the jeers of the women.

Presently he went into the lighted circle, and started talking to them. There was very little drink in them as yet and a shower of jeers fell to his lot. But the burden of his harangue was such as made his second shadow melt away into the darkness, making with all haste towards Alondi.

The mocking reception his speech received sent the witch-doctor back to his hut.

An hour later, however, he returned to the square and repeated his address. This time he gathered around him an audience of about a dozen, who listened to what he had to say, despite the mockery of their companions.

Midnight found the ousted priest still talking to a crowd that had increased as the gin had got a firmer hold on their faculties. They watched him with the beast very much awake in their eyes, but were held back from his proposition by the more sober of their

brethren and the hands of the women. These were mingled with Umboo's audience, with fear and anxiety on their faces, clutching at the arms of their half-intoxicated men-folk, shaking them frantically, endeavoring to put a little reason into their sodden brains.

"See you!" said the triumphant voice of Umboo, "is it not coming to pass even as I say? She has cast a spell on the women. Death to her as a witch, as one who would stir up strife and dissension between the men of Sassu and their wives! It is not right that the knowledge of women get beyond that of men. They will mock at you, flaunting their power before you so that you will lose face in the sight of all."

In daylight and sober the male inhabitants would have laughed their priest to scorn, but, with darkness, and under the influence of gin, their old belief in the power and evil of witches was very much to the fore. It seemed to them that witchcraft was really at work among their women, when their wives and mothers and sisters shook and slapped and argued with them, calling them fools and dolts and cowards in the open market-square.

Close at hand squatted a trio of Umboo's underlings, beating a tattoo on the war-drums that, in past days, had led some of the old men into battle against the whites. Drunken voices started talking of the times when they were their own rulers, of the blood orgies that had taken place then, till the night became a surge of rolling eyes and working nostrils that smelt back through the years to the blood that had reddened the hands of their forebears. A desire

to kill entered into them, to feel the warm red flood for themselves.

The wild tattoo, that had heralded war and rapine in years gone by, fell on the ears of the women in Mayoba's hut.

"There are fools out there," said one, "who listen to the words of Umboo."

"My man is chief," Mayoba answered. "He will see that no harm happens her."

Dorothy looked at the two women. The anxious note in the first voice, and the proud reply, had not escaped her. It had seemed to her that a curiously beast-like note had been creeping gradually into the sounds wafted across the square, very different from the light-heartedness that had been there earlier in the evening.

The little fire smoldering under the cauldron gave a sharp crackle, rendered very audible by the listening silence that had fallen on the three black women. A glow of flame danced among the brilliant embers, giving a red tinge to the rising steam.

A few minutes passed. The hubbub increased, bringing an occasional woman's voice, wild and entreating; a man's, deep and guttural, speaking in an uncouth tongue in a tone of savage authority.

Dorothy looked round for Peter, to find out from him what was happening outside. He was not there. For the first time she recollected not having noticed him hanging about the door lately, with an occasional look in at her, as he had done during the early portion of her stay in the village. She stayed pondering over the reason of his absence, listening to the ever-increasing noise that came from the square.

Presently the women crossed to her side, talking and gesticulating. It was not until they laid forcible hands on her that she realized they wanted to take her from the hut, to the shelter of the forest close at hand. She got up quickly with a feeling of fear, increased by the savage wave of sound that seemed suddenly to be bearing down in her direction. As she rose, a score of black figures loomed up in the light streaming out from the hut, making towards it with frantic haste, and formed a guard around its doorway as if to protect her.

Through the night echoed the savage roll of the war-drums, in a louder, fiercer tattoo.

Almost before the first body of men had got into position, there was another rush of naked feet. A further crowd surged up out of the darkness.

Dorothy stood, erect and straight, a white blur in the rising stream, hushing the baby mechanically, the pride of the dominant race very evident in her attitude. Until then she had had no idea these quaint, black people could look so hideous. She thought of the smiling, childlike crowds that had come to her at the dispensary, and wondered what had happened to change them into this array of wild beasts. The sight of her seemed to increase the fury of the oncoming mob. A shower of stones and filth was cast at the hut. The three women with her gave a piercing shriek, and crouched down with their arms about her knees.

Dorothy noticed the oncoming crowd greatly outnumbered the men around the door of the hut, that their rush was broken by the weight of the women

hanging on to them, that their leader was the old man whose place she had taken.

With thuds and groans and shrieks, the two crowds became one.

Then, as she watched, conscious only of the heavy, choking beat of her own heart, that seemed to fill the hut with its throb, a backward surge fell on the howling rabble. Through the rapidly lessening noise a voice was heard, loud and harsh and all-commanding, in Fanti, backed by sturdy English oaths. It was a voice that could penetrate the gin-sodden brains of the mob—one the majority of them obeyed without question six days out of seven, until obedience had become a habit. They broke up with a dazed, besotted air, sobered by its tone, hardly knowing, now, what it was Umboo had been egging them on to do, and were dragged away by their relieved women, back to the seclusion of their huts, lest the eye of the master should alight on any one man in particular, and punishment be meted out.

Harrison watched their quick dispersion with a feeling of relief. There was a hot, hurried look about him, that brought the ugly scar seaming his cheek very much in evidence. (He had been disturbed in the act of retiring by the entrance of Peter, breathless and footsore, with news of Dorothy's presence in Sassu village and the burden of Umboo's harangue.)

With quick haste, Harrison elbowed his way through the stragglers up to the door of the hut. The interior of a rude mud dwelling confronted him, filled with a haze of steam, lighted by a couple of candles, with three black women chattering excitedly

to the group of relieved negroes who had been guarding the door. He had eyes only for a girl standing, slim and pale, with a mite of coughing brown humanity in her arms.

Harrison was not a man who believed in alarming women-folk unnecessarily. He had arrived in time to prevent the old priest's desires becoming fact. Dorothy had no inkling of the loaded revolver lying in his pocket that he would have had no scruples about using if the strength of his personality had not been sufficient to sober the mob, or of the surmises that had haunted him during his quick journey up from Alondi as to what her fate might be in the hands of a half-drunken crowd swayed by a jealous priest.

She watched his approach with relief in her eyes, the way in which he had faced the mob, alone, foremost in her mind. She was beginning to see traits in his character that made her realize why Captain Vickers thought so much of him, and made a point of praising him whenever his name cropped up in conversation. There was a rude strength and courage about him in keeping with his rough appearance. The grudging admiration, that had filled her when she had considered the manner in which he had faced Brooks, came to her again.

He paused beside her, mopping his heated face with a blue, spotted handkerchief.

"Miss Gale, I must insist on your not going to outlying villages without my permission. These niggers are apt to get rowdy under drink, and you might have been roughly handled."

It struck her he was making light of the situation.

From the look in the eyes that had glared at her so ferociously she had imagined something more than a rough handling would have overtaken her. The thought of what might have happened through her not obeying his behests made her answer him very meekly.

"I know I ought not to have come, but I didn't think when they asked me. I'm sorry to have given you so much trouble, I'm——"

"It wasn't any trouble," he broke in brusquely, cutting short her thanks in the curt way he had done once before.

Dorothy sat down, watching him rather fearsomely, expecting some further comments on her thoughtlessness. Nothing more was said to her.

Harrison's gaze wandered round the hut, taking in the other occupants. His eyes rested on Mayoba searchingly; then a spasm of anger shot across his face.

Dorothy noted it, accounting for it by the fact that the scarlet-clad negress was the one responsible for her presence in the village. Instinctively she put in a good word for the woman, to try and stop the scolding that was on Harrison's lips.

"Her husband, the headman, the baby's father, was the man who was trying to keep those others from touching me," she said quickly.

Harrison's teeth set. He gazed from the blue eyes of the baby to the gray ones looking up at him. He thought of Ashby, as he had often seen him in lavender tie and cummerbund, that the commissioner had always worn since giving her the appropriate pet name so galling to him, Harrison, because it had

been his own conception of her; of the unsuspecting nature that had not seen through the other, that allowed a friendship and familiarity that would not have been tolerated had her knowledge of life been wider.

The desire to open her eyes was very strong upon him, to give her an insight into the commissioner's character; then it came to him that he had no ground for supposing Ashby was any more to her than half a dozen other men in the place who frequented her premises.

Several times during the weeks prior to the commissioner's departure, the uncomfortable thought had been with him that he ought to warn her against any great intimacy with the other. Ashby's leave having been so close at hand, and the knowledge of his own clumsiness and inability to tackle with any degree of success so delicate a subject, had prevented him doing so, much as he felt he ought. The unconcerned way in which she had taken the other's departure left him with a feeling that his suspicions were without foundation, and glad that he had not incurred her anger and dislike further by unnecessary interference and warnings against a man she counted as a friend.

Dorothy's voice broke in on his thoughts, making him thankful that no suspicion of evil lurked in her mind, bringing an ardent wish to have her entirely in his keeping, and, behind the shelter of his strength and knowledge, to keep all that was sordid from touching her.

"Won't you sit down?" she was saying. "You look tired after your hurry up here."

He sat down, feeling awkward and clumsy, knowing exactly how much room he occupied in the mind of the girl with him, searching round his head for a topic of conversation that would interest her.

The improvised bronchial kettle took his attention.

"Who gave you that idea, Miss Gale?" he asked, pointing to the bubbling cauldron.

His evident appreciation of the device brought a look of pleasure to her eyes.

"Nobody. It just came. I get it from my father. He lived a lot in out-of-the-way parts of the world, making shift with what came to hand. I'm the only one in the family who inherited his tastes."

Then she started talking about her father, of the places he had been to, and the books he had written, in a way that had never fallen to Harrison's lot before.

He studied the small face beside him. It was one that might have been passed by easily in the hurry of civilization, because it had no feature that attracted special attention. To him she hung like a star above Alondi, sweet and pure and far away, aloof from the common herd by reason of her gentle dignity—an epitome of all that was refined. A hat lay on the ground close to him, evidently thrown there by its owner in haste to get to work on the little invalid, a thing of white simplicity with a long lace veil. He did not like to see it there, where careless feet might trample of it, and crush and spoil its whiteness. He picked it up, and, since there was no place to put it where it would be quite safe, sat holding it with awkward care in his work-stained hands.

A voice talked on to him in a gentle, unassuming way, yet with a note in it that told him of the chasm that yawned between them.

All was quiet outside now. Only the wind moaned through the forest, its melancholy mingling with the pain of the hopeless love that filled him.

CHAPTER XVII

Frank Ashby's relatives did not make him very welcome when he appeared in England on his annual leave. He, however, had a habit of ignoring their snubs and cold shoulders, of button-holing them on every possible occasion—if there was anything to be gained by it.

Shortly after his arrival home from Africa, it had come to his ears that a rather important secretaryship in Hong-Kong would soon fall vacant. He had no liking for Alondi; his one wish was to get out of it if a more congenial means of livelihood could be found. On the strength of his aristocratic connections he had applied for this post in the Far East; then, with the persistency of a shadow, he had dogged the steps of his ducal cousin—a man with much power in the doling out of foreign appointments—demanding that he use all his influence in his (Ashby's) favor.

The day on which the decision of the choice of secretary would be known found Ashby, for a wonder, dining with his sister in the small furnished flat they rented when in town. It was typical of the Ashbys that none of their influential relatives ever showed any desire to accommodate them; of the man, also, that none of his confréres in Africa ever had the least wish to meet him in England; if they came across him accidentally, they never invited him to

their houses or encouraged any intimacy whatsoever.

The possible secretaryship in Hong-Kong had been the main topic of the Ashby's conversation during the first fortnight of their stay in England, and was very much to the fore that evening. Lilian appeared by far the more concerned of the two. Throughout the course of dinner she had watched her brother anxiously as he went through his repast with his habitual calm.

"Anyhow," she said suddenly, "I've had enough of Alondi; you won't see me out there again. Hong-Kong I'd go to gladly, but not that God-forsaken hole again. There's not an ounce of amusement to be had out of it now. Vickers is so desperately engaged. Young King runs away every time I look at him. As for the rest—a set of boors."

Ashby's eyes rested on her indifferently.

"It's a pity you made such a hash of things with 'The Reformer.' His pile would have solved the problem of existence for us nicely. As it is, we must do the best we can. Alondi, at least, is a living, though old Molyneaux only got me the post because the place is so notoriously unhealthy—a polite way of getting me off the earth."

"Well, so far you've succeeded in disappointing him. If he gets you Hong-Kong it'll be because it means three years' service on end, that you won't be in England to worry him every year as you'll go on doing if you stay in Alondi."

Ashby laughed carelessly.

"That's my one hope. He can get me that secretaryship if he likes. If he doesn't, it's only because he damned well won't."

"Yes, but it's more in the public eye than Alondi. They're not over particular who goes there, but they'll want to know more about a man going to Hong-Kong."

"Good Lord! We're not all born angels, Lil. Mine's not the blackest record on the list."

"Unfortunately old Molyneaux thinks it is. He may not like to be held responsible for foisting you into a decent post."

"Anyhow, there's no harm in trying."

Ashby got up, in no way perturbed by his sister's remarks, and leant against the chimney-piece smoking a cigarette thoughtfully.

Her gloomy prognostications were very much in his mind about an hour later, as he sat with an open letter in his hand, regarding it with an expression that gave no inkling of its contents.

"Well?" she asked.

The missive was torn in half, then across, and thrown into the fire.

"Polite refusal," was all he said.

For some minutes silence reigned in the small drawing-room.

"So you'll still have to make the most of what little amusement Alondi provides?" she said at length.

Ashby got up lazily.

"I suppose I shall. I've still two months of life between me and my next burial, that's one blessing."

Then he sauntered from the room with a slightly retrospective smile.

CHAPTER XVIII

The commissioner's absence made very little difference to Alondi. Vickers took his place, and the district went its way undisturbed by the change at the helm.

About a fortnight before Christmas a rumor came buzzing through the air, setting the place talking rather more than usual. Green got a murmur of it as he tidied himself in one of the bedrooms of Macqueen & Ancram's, prior to going up to the hospital for tea. It drifted in from the balcony, together with other items of local interest, all of which he noted as material for conversation later on. Every evening, as soon as the store could dispense with his services, Green set off to the hospital, where he occupied a cubicle in the ward; and at any hour during the day when things were slack he was to be found on Dorothy's veranda. In spite of lack of mutual interests, he was always sure of a welcome there. Grateful for his presence on her premises at night, and full of pity for him, knowing him to be most unsuited for the country, she passed over his many shortcomings, and stifled the irritation his speech and mannerisms roused.

Green emerged from his seclusion on a wave of Florida water, to call further information on the subjects that had tickled his ears. Some short time afterwards the same wave of scent heralded his ar-

rival on Dorothy's balcony. There was an air of news-to-be-imparted about him, as he came along, that was not lost on her.

"Well, what is it?" she asked as he seated himself.

The youngster was too well-trained a gossip to give his most important news first. He started with one of the minor items.

"There's yellow fever at Ashranhi," he said. "Williams, the engineer's got it. Had it the last two days. Harrison tried to keep it quiet. Put a couple of niggers to nurse him, and has an occasional look in himself."

"Why wasn't he sent here?" she asked with surprise.

"Expect your boss thinks yellow fever ain't exactly the job you'd care to tackle."

Dorothy said nothing, but poured out tea with a determination that had no bearing on her occupation.

During the past few weeks she had seen more of Harrison than she had in the whole of her first two months in Alondi. Three days after her adventure in Sassu village she had asked to go there again, to see how her little patient was faring under the instructions she had left with its mother, and had accepted his escort willingly. She had found he could be quite an agreeable companion. He had a knowledge of the fauna, flora, and folk-lore of the country that exceeded Ashby's, besides twenty years of wanderings in all parts of the world to draw from. He had expressed a willingness to show her the surrounding country beyond walking limits, that could be reached by taking a trolley for some miles on the

line. She had seen it would please him, and deemed it a means of settling the unpaid debts to him that hung somewhat heavily on her; added to this was her own inborn love of exploring. These combined facts made her accept his invitations, with the result that the two were on a much more friendly footing than during her first few weeks in Alondi, and Harrison's surly lapses had become things of the past.

The youngster chatted on, giving further items of local gossip, but Dorothy's head was too full of Harrison's action and her own empty ward to give him much heed.

After several futile attempts to entrap her straying attention, desperation made him play his best card.

"Have you heard that Ashby's not coming back?"

Her eyes came to him at once, with astonishment and disbelief in them. She paused half-way through the slice of cake she was cutting, Harrison and all connected with him submerged by this piece of intelligence.

"Dickson heard from a man up from the port by this afternoon's train that he's going to Hong-Kong," Green went on. "Secretaryship. Heard of it the day he landed in England. Applied a second time. Got it, too! So he's rid of Alondi at last. What he's been trying for ever since he was dumped out here."

Mechanically Dorothy finished cutting the cake: the knife went on right through the d'oyley, a fact she was not aware of. A swarm of wild questions buzzed in her head, that seem as if they would rush out from his lips in spite of her struggle after indif-

ference. Little hammers beat in her brain, set to the music of Ashby's voice. Every word of his farewell stood out big and bold before her. The news could not be true. After all he had silently pleaded for before he left Alondi, he would have written telling her of his promotion, not let it come to her from an outside source. She wanted to ask who had told Dickson; on what authority and how the news had come to the port; to declare it false. Her lover could not be capable of such infidelity! And the whole time a boy's vulgar voice rapped out further staccato sentences that pierced nails into her heart. She heard herself answering his comments in a voice that amazed her by its unconcerned tone.

Long after the youngster left she sat thinking over the news he had brought, heedless of the passing time, watching the thickening shadows close in around her and the lights that sprang up one by one in the valley.

Presently, through the night came the flare of Harrison's lamp. What Green had said on his arrival came back to her. She remembered the case of yellow fever that by rights should be in her care. Her one desire was to get away from her own thoughts. Work might bring oblivion. On an impulse she got up, and set out towards the light.

Her voice roused Harrison as he sat in the little room opposite his veranda steps, that served him as an office, going through the newly arrived mail.

"Mr. Harrison, why haven't you sent the Ashranhi engineer to the hospital?"

He got to his feet very smartly, surprise and pleasure on his face, wondering why she should have

come to him about a matter that could have been talked over during the brief minutes of his official visit to the hospital, now a daily occurrence. Dorothy had not been on his premises since the time of her arrival in the township, when stress of circumstances had forced his hospitality on her. That she should have come now, for no apparent reason, brought him to her side with a glint of something warmer than welcome in his eyes.

"For the simple reason that I don't consider it a suitable case for you," he said in reply to her question.

"But I'm here to take all cases."

Harrison was not in the habit of arguing with those under his sway. Usually he said what he had to say, and any attempt at further discussion was quelled with the force of a sledge-hammer. In this case, however, he showed rare lenience.

"That depends on the case," he said.

"Not at all. If the man's ill he ought to be sent to the hospital, not left in the care of natives, when the company went to the expense of sending me out here."

This answer brought a smile to his lips.

"Suppose you sit down," he said, drawing out a chair, "and we talk over the case of Williams."

Dorothy accepted his invitation, glad of anything that might take her away from herself.

He leant against the desk beside her, still trying to fathom the reason of her visit.

She glanced at him, for the first time noting that he was clothed differently from usual; that he was not wearing the khaki trousers and cotton shirt of

the mine, or the white drill suit in which he paid his official visits to her, but the regulation dinner-garb of the Alondi government circle—well-fitting white linen with broad silk cummerbund—that took a lot of the coarseness from his appearance. She remembered she had come in hospital uniform, cap and apron complete, the only time he had seen her in it since London days, except the night of Brooks' escapade.

"When any one of my staff gets ill," he said, "I like to find out what caused it—if it's the result of the climate only, or gross carelessness or misbehavior on his part. If a man knows there's a case of yellow fever at a negro village, and yet deliberately goes there, against orders, to indulge in some mad orgie with the natives, risking bringing infection back to his own sort, would you say that man's life was of much account?"

"Is that how Mr. Williams got ill?"

"Exactly."

Dorothy experienced a feeling of nausea. She had a horror of the white who mixed familiarly with the black in the manner this explanation suggested. All desire to have the care of him left her. The mere idea of his being at the hospital filled her with repulsion. Then duty pointed out that, as nurse, only the illness and not the character of the patient was her concern.

"No matter how he got ill, he ought not to be left in native hands."

"I shall deal with him as I think fit, Miss Gale. He stays where he is and takes his chance."

There was a note in his voice that Dorothy had

heard once or twice before, that said she might talk till doomsday and his decision would remain the same—a glint of the rugged power that had brought order into the chaos that had once reigned in the Mussatti mines. Just then she was very pleased to bow to his will, glad that the matter was taken entirely out of her hands.

She rose with a feeling of relief. Her action made Harrison quickly broach another subject in order to prevent her departure.

"I've got a piece of news that will interest you," he said, picking up a letter from the desk.

Dorothy took the proffered correspondence, noting the firm's official envelope, and glanced through the contents—to the effect that a new medical officer would arrive at the mines within the next week or two.

"I wonder what Dr. Hart will be like," she remarked, handing the letter back.

"Let us hope an improvement on Brooks."

Her eyes met his with a look that said the recollection of her last interview with Brooks was strong upon her.

The glance brought out what had been growing up in Harrison's mind since her unexpected entrance.

"Captain Vickers is coming for dinner, Miss Gale. Will you join us?"

Although accustomed by now to the bohemian ways of the place, the invitation was a surprise to her; she accounted for it by Harrison's ignorance of social matters. There was a moment's pause as she sought for terms in which to give a pleasant refusal. In doing so, it came to her mind that Captain Vickers

would be able to tell her whether the news she had heard concerning Ashby was really true. Conventionalities were forgotten in a desire for the truth.

"I'll be very pleased to," she said, "but I must change my frock first."

That his invitation had not been refused, as he had expected, brought him to her side with an eagerness unnoticed by Dorothy, whose head was too full of Frank Ashby to have room for anything else.

"What's wrong with that?" he asked.

"It's not even clean. I wore it in the dispensary all afternoon, and was too lazy to change before tea. I'll go straight away now, so as not to be keeping dinner waiting."

She turned in her quick, light way, and was out of the office and down the steps before Harrison had time to follow out his intention of accompanying her. As he looked at her departing form a recollection of duty as host seized him, making him go round to the kitchen to announce the presence of a second guest and make several additions to the menu.

When this was done he went quickly towards the hospital. Dorothy was not overtaken on the route. He arrived there in time to see her disappearing into her bedroom. He leaned against the balcony rail watching the light that streamed out from her apartment, fidgeting restlessly with a spray of creeper that came trailing across his arm, thinking of nothing but why she should have come to him.

Her reappearance crushed a lot of the hope that the unexpected acceptance of his invitation had roused.

Dorothy looked her best in evening attire. Har-

rison realized this as she came through the curtains. The knowledge of the gulf between them, that he had forgotten when she sat in his office in nursing attire, came back to him. A mad desire to ask what she had done with the emerald brooch seized him. It was just what was wanted to gleam in the soft black lace at her breast.

However, all inclination to touch on the past left him as she crossed to his side. Dorothy was in that state of mental suffering that endeavors to lose itself by distributing sweetness all around. No suggestion of a rebuke fell to his lot for his unasked presence on her premises.

"It's very good of you to have bothered to come up for me," she said.

"Hadn't you better bring a shawl or something?" he asked, a trifle thickly. "It may be damp coming back."

On the way down to his bungalow she talked with the feverish energy of one possessed of a desire to escape thought. When they arrived there he took her towards a seat on the veranda. On passing the open dining-room door the metamorphosis there was observed by the girl, whose eyes were open for the least distraction.

"Why, it's quite different!" she said, coming to a halt and gazing in.

The room bore but little resemblance to the bare, sordid apartment she had been taken into on the evening of her arrival in Alondi. Harrison had gathered together another collection of curios, which now adorned the walls. A dull mahogany dresser, with a carving in fleur-de-lis, occupied the position

where the packing-case had stood formerly; on it was a palm in a beaten brass bowl, and a glitter of glass and decanters. A coffer to match stood along the opposite wall, with a litter of books and magazines. The chairs had been supplemented by half a dozen in white Madeira cane.

Dorothy entered with all a woman's feeling of interest in a bachelor's household. The odor of tobacco was still very much in evidence. The table set for dinner looked rather nice with its glitter of glass and plate, and the glow of a red-shaded lamp falling on the gilt tops of champagne bottles, and dishes of chocolates in silver paper. There was a daintiness and refinement about it that she had not expected to find in anything connected with her host.

One flaw caught her attention at once. The flowers were rammed into the vases in the crushed, crowded way that told of a negro hand.

"Why is it the 'houseboys' always put flowers in as if their one idea were to see how many could be got into the square inch?" she asked.

Deft fingers, in search of occupation, started to rectify this error. There was a domesticated air about her action, most fascinating under the circumstances.

They were standing together, Dorothy arranging the flowers, Harrison watching her, when Vickers entered. If, knowing her early dislike for the Mussatti manager, the captain felt any surprise at seeing her there, it did not come into his greeting. The situation was one that pleased him. He and Harrison had drifted slowly together as the two strong men in the town. A little of the other's state

of feeling he had guessed at, and he knew him to be a man of the type whose career depends very much on the treatment received at the hands of the woman on whom he bestows his affections. Rumor said a woman had blithted his early manhood. Vickers experienced a hope that this would not happen again now, at an age capable of still deeper feeling.

It seemed to him, as he saw them together, that it was with a man such as Harrison, a girl like Dorothy Gale ought to follow out her pioneer instincts; certainly not alone. Stronger than ever was a feeling of thankfulness that it was Harrison, and not one of several men in the district, into whose care she had been committed, and a hope that his lack of finish and his low origin would not blind her to his real worth.

During the course of dinner Dorothy sat with ears ready for any remark that might lead up to the opening she desired without a noticeable effort on her part. Ashby's name appeared to be tabooed by the two men. It was not until dessert was reached that any mention was made of the absent commissioner. Then Vickers referred to local affairs for the first time.

"It's more than likely Mason of Broquetta will have this district if Ashby gets the billet he's after," he said.

Harrison glanced searchingly at Dorothy, all that Alondi had said about her and the absent commissioner foremost in his mind. There was idle interest on her face, but nothing more, as she picked out

a chocolate from a dish beside her, skinning it leisurely as she followed up the captain's opening.

"Mr. Ashby's going to Hong-Kong, isn't he?" she asked.

"He was applying for a post there, and I believe he's managed to get it," Vickers answered.

"I know he never cared for Alondi," she went on. "I remember him saying before he left how much he disliked it, so I hope he's got something more to his taste."

Her indifferent reception of the news of the commissioner's removal took all anxiety from Harrison.

"Ashby knows the East, so I expect he'll get on well out there," he said, feeling he could afford to be generous.

Dorothy went on talking. Up till now she had been buoyed up with the knowledge that Green's facts, when sifted, usually proved but rumor. She heard herself speaking, yet the voice did not sound like hers, and it came from a long way off, muffled by a distance. A great weight seemed to press on her with a heaviness that left her sick and numb and chill.

One sentence throbbed in her brain, so loudly and persistently that she felt the men with her must hear it—

"Good-by, 'Sweet Lavender,' and—don't forget me."

She was not the one who had forgotten!

CHAPTER XIX

Four days before Christmas, Dr. Hart arrived in Alondi. Dorothy welcomed him as she now welcomed anything in the nature of a diversion. Every amusement or distraction that presented itself had been seized on with alacrity. She hardly knew how the time had been lived through since the news of Ashby's removal had come so unexpectedly. Two mail days had passed, the letters they brought gone through eagerly with a hope there would be some message from him.

During the course of the evening on which she had dined with Harrison, Vickers had asked her to lunch with him the following day. On arriving at the captain's bungalow, she had found her chief there. That his presence might be due to conclusions Vickers had drawn the previous night had not occurred to her. Knowing the strong friendship that existed between the two men, and not wishing to bring any feeling of restraint into the meal, had made her treat Harrison with the same cordiality that she always doled out to her host. Harrison's inward delight had been boundless, for the voice that chatted to him had lost all the subtle note of aloofness that his ear had been quick to note in spite of her friendliness. It seemed to him that his unfortunate mistake was really forgotten and forgiven, that her toleration of him no longer owed its existence to indebtedness.

He had escorted her back to the hospital. His invitation to spend the following afternoon in sightseeing had been accepted with flattering readiness. Four other afternoons had been spent with him in expeditions into the surrounding country, and he had been asked to a tea-party she was giving on Christmas Day—the first invitation of the kind that had fallen to his lot. She had lunched again with Vickers; on that occasion, also, Harrison had been there.

During the course of the meal the captain had asked her to act as hostess at a Christmas Eve dinner he was giving. Harrison had expressed a desire to be her escort, which she had agreed to, as she was beginning to be interested in him and really enjoyed his companionship; he always seemed to know what topics appealed to her, and had the power of taking her out of herself for the time being.

Dr. Hart, also, succeeded in keeping her thoughts at bay a little. She was very sorry for him. The whisper of a tragedy had come with him to Alondi —that of an unfaithful wife, whose memory he endeavored to lull by means of opium. Dorothy had taken him in hand—had tried to interest him in the dispensary patients and the country.

The afternoon of Christmas Eve found her alone. An influx of visitors for the holiday season had kept Green at the store; the rest of Alondi were too busy with the Christmas mail to pay calls; the day evidently held painful memories for Hart—he had resorted to his means of oblivion.

Dorothy envied him as she sat out on the hospital veranda watching the sun going down in a glow

of rose and gold that brought back, more acutely than ever, the memory of Ashby's farewell.

A step on the stairs roused her. She glanced round to see Harrison with an array of parcels that the afternoon train had just brought.

She got up quickly and went to meet him, anxious for the packages as a means of diversion. To one with no hint as to what lay at the bottom of her action her manner suggested he was very welcome.

"They've only just come, Miss Gale," he said, depositing them on a table. "I thought you'd like to have them at once, so I brought them along."

"It was very good of you to trouble."

"You know I'm only too pleased to do anything for you."

She looked at him with a vague smile—her thoughts far away—knowing some polite rejoinder had been made, but what she had not caught.

He watched her with lover-like tenderness. He had noted the air of suppressed tiredness that she had acquired lately, but he accounted for it by the climate and the fact that, since Brooks' departure, the whole of the responsibility of the hospital had fallen on her shoulders.

"Now Hart's here I shall order you a fortnight's holiday, starting from to-morrow," he said. "I'll take you a series of all-day excursions. Then we'll get much further afield and touch quite fresh country."

"Please don't order me a holiday. Things are slack enough as it is. There's been hardly one one at the dispensary during the last few days."

Harrison could have said why there had been so few patients; however, he desisted.

"I'll hold it over you as a threat if you insist on looking so tired and worried," he said instead. "Now, I know you are dying to open your parcels, so I won't stay any longer. Good-by until to-night."

He swung off the balcony in an almost boyish manner. Dorothy noted nothing of this—her eyes had not acquired the habit of following him.

She gathered up the parcels and took them to her room, putting them on the lounge. One—a neat, firm-looking package, addressed in a handwriting she did not know—roused her curiosity.

This she opened first.

A bright tin box came to light, that gave no inkling of the contents, with oiled paper pasted along the joining of the box and lid. This she cut, then pried her penknife underneath the top and opened it.

All the scent of a lavender field greeted her, drenching her with perfume. The box was packed with frail, faded flowers, the scent of which long confinement and close packing brought into the room like a wave of incense.

The flood drowned all in Dorothy but one thing. It did not need the twisted little note lying on the top to tell her who the sender was. Trembling fingers picked this out and opened it.

"If you hear I'm not coming back, 'Sweet Lavender,' don't believe it. I had the offer of a post in Hong-Kong, but didn't take it. Can't you guess why?—F.A."

The note fell to the ground, and she dropped on her knees with her face buried in the sweetness. All the pain and heartache of the last two weeks came out in an agony of tears that died down to little sobs of pure happiness.

CHAPTER XX

A NEW Dorothy greeted Harrison a couple of hours later when he came to escort her to Vickers' bungalow. All the tired listlessness had vanished. The ripple of her happy laugh reached him as he mounted the stairs. He saw her standing by Green's side, stroking with a hesitating forefinger the head of a ruffled-looking, gray parrot, chained to the veranda rail—a new importation since his last visit.

"See what I've had given to me, Mr. Harrison," she called gaily as he approached. "Isn't he a beauty? Kippers has expended three months on his education—been training him as a surprise present for me."

A waft of lavender reached him—the faint, delicate scent that was his ideal of her with its fragrance and simplicity. This he noted at once, for Dorothy was not in the habit of resorting to perfume. Beneath the fichu of her soft black frock was stowed a handful of Ashby's flowers—a secret for herself alone, that made her want to take up the whole world and caress it.

Harrison knew nothing of this; only the scent of lavender and the unusual cordiality of her greeting reached him.

"What can he say?" he asked. "Dorothy?"

"You bet!" Green chimed in. "And lots more. He can recite, sing, whistle, and quote scripture.

Miles away the best talker I've ever dropped across."

"I shan't want anyone to entertain me now, shall I, Kippers?" she said, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"That's hard lines on Alondi, Miss Gale," Harrison answered. "You'll find me coming up one night and wringing his neck."

Her eyes rested on him laughlingly.

"I'd no idea you were capable of such depths of jealousy." Then she descended to facts. "Now, we must be starting. I've to be there first you know."

"Let me put this round your shoulders," he said, taking a shawl from the rail. "There's a more than usual dampness in the air to-night."

Dorothy had forgotten everything connected with Harrison. The world came to her through a glow of rose and gold and lavender. She turned for him to drape the wrap around her shoulders. There was a tremor about his big, red hands as he put it with clumsy carefulness around her.

Quite naturally she gave him the bag with her slippers, then turned to the youngster.

"Come along, Kippers, you're going our way."

Outside Macqueen & Ancram's, Dickson was standing. Dorothy greeted him with a warmth and brightness that did not usually fall to his share.

"Don't expect Kippers to turn up at your place till the small hours of the morning, Miss Gale," he said. "Two of my assistants have gone down with slight malaria, making us short-handed when things are extra busy."

"I never go to bed till he's on the premises," she assured him, "so please don't make me sit up all night. And"—the invitation was born of happiness—"I'm having a Christmas tea-party. Mr. Harrison has promised to come; will you come too?"

Dickson shuffled out of this unexpected honor on a plea of stress of business.

"Well, another day then, when you're not quite so busy," she said, turning away with a nod of farewell.

Silence fell on Harrison as they went on together towards the track leading up to Vickers' dwelling. Dorothy was in a state of dreamy happiness, oblivious of her companion.

Over the hill a half moon was hanging in a halo of white brilliance. Black arms of trees waved fantastically against a fading purple sky that was quickly paling into a mist of frosted blue. The path was blotched and barred with a constantly moving mosaic in jet and silver as the wind, soughing through the night, waved the branches overhead. Fireflies sparkled with the glitter of hoar frost on the track and undergrowth around, and flew up like a shower of sparks when a movement disturbed them. From a patch of swamp near came the whisper of rushes and the cheerful croak of a myriad of frogs. Great noisy beetles blundered with a buzz and whir out from nowhere. Golden bats flitted silently in a faintly silvered mist. All around was the steady sigh of the forest.

Dorothy walked with a step that was almost a

dance. The world was aglow with the radiance that was within her.

Harrison's voice broke in on her dream—

"Why didn't you tell me straight off you were afraid of being alone at the hospital?"

She looked at him, soft-eyed and smiling.

"Because I'm too proud to show my weaknesses."

"Well, don't be with me then, for I want to know them all."

But Dorothy's attention had gone from him to a long, thin, white-clad figure that had just emerged from a side track into the one they were following.

"Why, there's young Lieutenant King, and he cut us dead! He walks at such a rate we'll never overtake him."

"Never mind him," Harrison said hurriedly.

Her voice had obeyed the order of her mind, drowning his remark.

"Mr. King! Mr. King!" she called.

The boy ahead halted sharply, then turned quickly, retracing his long strides.

"What do you mean by running away from me?" she asked.

"Indeed, Miss Gale, I never saw you," he answered, in a shy, matter-of-fact manner.

"Well, you can't escape me now," she said, linking her arm through his.

For the rest of the journey most of her attention was devoted to the newcomer.

The same caressing happiness radiated from her during the course of the evening, making Vickers glance from her to Harrison calculatingly. There

was an air about the latter as if he wanted to keep his head cool. He had no wine at dinner, neither did he indulge in whisky or cocktails afterwards.

Several times during the course of conversation the subject of Ashby's removal was broached, with surmises as to whether the rumor were true or not.

Dorothy said nothing, but her laugh rang out more gaily than ever. It was a message for her alone—her own precious secret—not for the whole of Alondi.

Soon after eleven she got up—tired with the weight of her own happiness—and left the crowd that had claimed her all evening, going to where Harrison sat with Vickers and a couple of other men playing bridge. She laid her hand on Harrison's shoulder in the same friendly manner she had on Green's.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you," she said to him, "but I really must go now."

The quartette rose at her voice.

"You look tired, Miss Gale," Vickers remarked. "I'm afraid I've shirked my duties and let the burden of my guests fall on you."

"Not in the least. I've enjoyed myself immensely."

"Miss Gale has had too much work and responsibility lately," Harrison put in, watching her with a tenderness evident to all but Dorothy, whose eyes were blurred with visions of Frank Ashby; "but it won't happen again, now Hart's here."

She laughed glancing at him kindly.

"Mr. Harrison always thinks I work too hard.

In all my life I've never had quite the easy time I have now."

Vickers walked to the head of the stairs with the departing couple, with an arm around Harrison's shoulder, then stood watching them until they disappeared round a bend in the moonlit track.

The walk went on for some way in silence. Dorothy was in dreamland, the man with her forgotten. Her face was raised a little, with something of the soft glow of the silvered scene radiating from it. Beneath the shelter of the shawl her hands were folded under Ashby's flowers. The attitude and her expression had a saintliness that held her companion awed for a time.

Presently his voice reached her, but the world in which she moved was so remote from him, that she heard nothing of its tense, strained note. It was a moment or two, in fact, before she became aware he was speaking.

"Perhaps I ought to have looked for my mate in one of the curled and feathered Harriets of the slum that bred me," he was saying when her attention reached him. "But in that way I wanted the best —a girl of the sort that doesn't usually come the way of a man like me, unless he's got a stack of gold behind him. At twenty-six I'd made my pile and set out to look for a woman of the kind I wanted. I thought I'd got her too—was within an ace of marrying her when I found out my mistake. She drove me back to the dregs I sprang from. It's nearly nine years ago now. Since then I've been through hell, and come out to find a new Heaven and a new earth. I've not a red cent in the world now

beyond my five hundred as Mussatti manager, and I want the thousands I squandered trying to get rid of that other woman's face."

Dorothy attached no personal meaning to his speech. She took it as paving the way to some confidence of the kind several other men in Alondi had already committed to her.

"Why?" she asked sympathetically.

"For you, darling. To give you all you ought to have to help smooth off the roughness of being the wife of a man like me."

One glance was cast at him, full of bewilderment and confusion. In that she read what was on his face, and it left her with a desire for nothing but escape. She made a quick, forward movement. Before two steps had been taken an arm was around her, holding her with a strength that made flight impossible.

"Don't run away, my darling," he whispered, drawing her close against him.

All the passion and the power of the man vibrated through her. His quick breath fanned her cheek. The heat and tremor of the hand holding her struck through the thin silk of her gown. Every particle of pride rose up at his embrace. Everything was forgotten but his audacity.

"Let me go."

There was no mistaking the anger and aversion in her voice. It left him dumbfounded. A moment of silence followed. He held her, watching her with amazement that changed to searching scrutiny.

During the months of Dorothy's sojourn in Alondi he had studied her closely. Since Lilian Ashby's

departure her position as the only white woman in the settlement had made her an object of great attention among the men in the place, and had given her every opportunity of breaking hearts had she been so inclined. She had never used her position unfairly. Alondi, with its crowd of Argus-eyed gossips, had never been able to accuse her of flirtation. Harrison had placed her above the pettinesses of her sex. It had seemed to him that she had taken pains that evening to show him that he might lay his suit before her. Her reception of his avowal was entirely different from what he had expected. It came with a shock of an earthquake, shattering the dream-city he had built up during the past two weeks, leaving him in no state to consider more than the one fact her attitude put most plainly before him.

"Don't say you've been fooling me, sweetheart," he said hoarsely.

There was a note of intense anguish in his voice, brought there by the thought that his ideal might again prove but a mirage.

Emotion thickened his speech and brought a dull red flush to his face. As Dorothy looked at him she could find no explanation for his conduct, except that he must have been drinking too freely during the evening—an idea that brought back all the antipathy she had had for him.

"Let me go at once," she said, with even greater anger.

There was a brief pause as he groped round for a solution of the situation. A look of comprehension, anger and contempt swept across his face,

swamping all the love and tenderness that had been there.

"So you thought you'd pay me back for my early mistake, did you?" he said savagely. "I was fool enough to put you above that sort of thing."

Dorothy's mind was whirling. She made a desperate effort to free herself. All the faint, sweet scent of the hidden lavender was wafted up to him, mocking him with the thought of his shattered ideal.

The idea that she had been trifling with him roused all the coarseness of the slums. His arm tightened round her with a strength that prevented escape.

"If I'm good enough to flirt with, my lady, I'm good enough to kiss."

He drew her to him roughly. A sob of fear broke from her lips. For a moment he held her crushed close against him, watching her hungrily; then he pushed her away with a gesture that sent her reeling.

"You damned little flirt! May you get all the torture you've given me."

Without a further glance at her, he turned away. She stood where the force of his arm had sent her, dazed and trembling, conscious of nothing except that he had gone.

CHAPTER XXI

Macqueen & Ancram's store was celebrating the arrival of Christmas. The whole of the white population of Alondi that was not at the deputy-commissioner's had assembled there, supplemented by others from the outlying mines and factories, and such of the railwaymen who from a lack of funds were prevented joining in the greater festivities that were going on at the distant port.

The saloon was hazy with smoke, that hung in the hot, heavy air in little rings and clouds, harsh with the bellow of a gramophone and the rasping, contradictory voices of the men, impregnated with the triple odor of whisky, tobacco, and paraffin oil, the last coming from a trio of lamps slung down the middle of the room. The windows and doors of the place were wide open, letting out this combination of sounds and smells to mingle with the silvered mist and murmur of a tropic night.

At a table in a corner a poker party was in progress. Dickson, as usual, sat at the head, playing with a bluff and nerve that aroused the admiration of the onlookers. The noise of some belated reveller entering into the saloon took the eye of several of the group to the door.

A remark from one of them brought Dickson's attention from the game to the newcomer.

"What in the name of all that's holy is 'The Reformer' doing here!"

Similar exclamations drew the eyes of the rest of the party to the entering figure.

Heedless of the crowd watching him, or the whispers that his unexpected presence caused, Harrison crossed to the bar. There was a heavy rise and fall about his shoulders, a pallor beneath his deep tan, and a glint in his eyes that prevented anyone accosting him.

The company watched him speculatively as he ordered and drank three whiskies in succession, then retired to a little table apart from the rest of the assembly. A negro waiter followed him with a bottle and a glass, set those at his elbow, and left him sitting there, with savage, brooding gaze fixed on the floor.

"Looks as if he's going to make a night of it," someone remarked to Dickson. "What's happened to knock him off the straight?"

Dickson was a man of some perception. He had had a suspicion of the Mussatti manager's condition of late; moreover, had taken good stock of him during the few minutes' conversation he had had with Dorothy earlier in the evening. He knew something unusual must have happened to make Mark Harrison seek diversion in the way he was doing. In his mind there remained no doubt as to the reason.

"He's been on the wrong scent for the last few weeks, and has just found out his error," he replied.

This somewhat cryptic reply brought a volley of questions, to which, however, Dickson gave no immediate reply. He waited until Harrison had

consumed his sixth drink, then got up and crossed to where the latter was sitting.

A little crowd followed, eager for what was about to happen; conversation between the two had a knack of ending in blows.

Dickson leaned against the bar, watching Harrison with vicious amusement. A scowl was all the latter gave him as a greeting.

There was a brief silence broken by Macqueen & Ancram's manager.

"I suppose you've heard," he said pleasantly, "that Ashby's coming back?"

Two bloodshot eyes looked at him with a sullen, savage gleam.

"What the hell has that to do with me?"

With this remark Harrison's attention went back to the whisky, in a manner that showed most clearly further conversation was not desired.

His attitude deterred Dickson in no way.

"Didn't Miss Gale tell you?" he inquired amiably.

"I thought she would have done so, considering she counts you a bit of a friend of hers. At seven o'clock this evening she was the only one in Alondi to know of his return. He sent the news to her privately. Since then, though, I've come to hear of it."

The bottle of whisky in Harrison's hand was put back on the table with a clatter that went echoing down the now listening saloon, for what Dickson was relating was news to more than the man he was actually talking to.

"Didn't it strike you to wonder what had made her so bright and lively to-night?" Dickson went

on, watching his victim tauntingly. "She had a letter from Ashby this afternoon saying he'd refused the Hong-Kong job for her sake. None of us ever guessed there was anything serious on between those two. She didn't give herself away by fretting after he left."

Something seemed to catch and draw Harrison's throat as he watched the speaker, unbelievingly.

"It's a lie," he said thickly.

Dickson laughed.

"Is it though? Ashby sent her a whole stack of lavender by to-day's mail. Kippers saw the place full of it, asked where it had come from, and she wouldn't tell him. Trust him to find out. Whilst she was dressing he hunted round. He found a note, read it, of course, and handed the contents on to me. 'If you hear I'm not coming back, "Sweet Lavender," don't believe it. I had the offer of a post in Hong-Kong, but didn't take it. Can't you guess why?'—Ashby's initials to that. That's what made her buck up so lively all at once. Everybody's noticed how seedy she's been looking the last few days, but no one ever put it down to him not coming back."

Dead silence followed.

The whisky Harrison had inbibed had by no means dulled his brain. His eyes had stayed on Dickson with slowly dawning comprehension as the latter's speech had gone on. A very different light was thrown on the doings of the past fortnight.

His mind went back to the night Dorothy had dined with him, when the wild hope that she might care for him had first come into his head. He saw

now that it was not for his sake she had accepted the invitation. That was the night on which the news of Ashby's promotion had reached Alondi; Vickers, who had been his guest on that occasion, was the man to whom to apply for further information. The recollection of her indifferent manner when the commissioner's removal had been broached came back to him. It had deceived him in common with the rest.

Through the reeking smoke of the saloon a girl's face was conjured up before him, soft-eyed and smiling; a happy voice was echoing in his ears. "Because I'm too proud to show my weaknesses."

And he had put it all down to his account!

With a rush came the reason for so much of her society having fallen to his lot during the past two weeks. He had a motive for seeking her out; her acceptance of his invitations had been nothing more than a desire to escape thought, and had not originated from either of the two causes he had imagined—love of him; and, on discovering his error, a malicious woman's desire to be even with him.

The reason of every one of her actions was painfully clear. He knew that up to the last fortnight he had not enjoyed nearly as much of her society as had most of the men in Alondi. Because of her indebtedness to him she had overlooked the past, and had treated him with a certain degree of friendliness. During the past two weeks he had allowed his own feelings to put a wrong construction on the way she had acted towards him, and, finally, had rewarded her with insults and brutality.

A spasm of pain twitched across his face.

The silence in which the news had been received goaded Dickson to further efforts.

"You thought Ashby's 'Sweet Lavender' was gone on you, didn't you?" he sneered, "because she let you take her out a bit and talk pretty to her. I might as well think she's gone on me because she asked me up for tea and wouldn't take 'No' for an answer."

Harrison got up with a swiftness that made Dickson back involuntarily. A ring formed round them immediately, everybody expecting a fight.

To the surprise of the assembly the Mussatti manager elbowed his way through the circle and went straight from the saloon. The world held nothing for him but a girl's sobbing, terrified cry that his behavior was responsible for.

CHAPTER XXII

Christmas Day was born with the howl of a rising gale in the forests surrounding Alondi, and an atmosphere that echoed and vibrated with uncouth music and savage revelry. By midnight the moon had disappeared; only the glimmer of stars livened the moaning darkness.

Mussatti Hill was seemingly deserted; but one light showed up from the various European residences there. The inhabitants were away, keeping the festival at Macqueen & Ancram's; their servants, also, were celebrating the fête in a manner of their own at the adjacent native village. There, columns of smoke and showers of sparks curled and crackled against the lowering sky. The pungent odor of the bonfires and the echoes of barbaric merry-making reached Dorothy, who was all alone in the hospital, awaiting the return of her youthful guardian before going to bed.

The light of the reading-lamp on the sitting-room table played on her tired face as she sat in a low chair beside it, clad in a loose white dressing-gown, and with her weight of hair tied back with a ribbon, brooding over the burden of insults that the night had brought. A bunch of Ashby's flowers was on her knee; around these her hands were clasped in an effort to find solace in their fragrance and the thought of his return.

After Harrison had left her, she had gone on,

bruised and numb, conscious only of a great relief that he was no longer with her, and a desire to get beyond his reach. Such a climax as the one the evening had brought had never entered her mind. In their most friendly moments it had never come within her consideration that he might aspire to marriage with her. His presumption seemed unbounded. An aching head searched round trying to find some excuse for his remarks. She reviewed all her dealings with him, looking for a reason that could have made him come to the conclusion he had. There were twenty other men in the surrounding district with whom she was on terms of equal intimacy. The only things she had not taken into consideration were his capacity for misconstruction and his origin. A feeling of utter loathing for him filled her—a wild wish to be out of Africa and away from him.

The sound of heavy footsteps on the veranda penetrated in on her musings. She glanced round sharply just as the blind across the doorway was drawn roughly to one side. For a moment she stared with wide eyes on the entering figure, nothing in her mind but the sense of her complete isolation.

Harrison, as he had come straight up from Macqueen & Ancram's, was not a sight to inspire confidence. The emotion that the knowledge of his error had caused, combined with heat and the amount of drink he had consumed, had swelled the veins in his neck and forehead to a degree almost repulsive. Hurry had reddened his face and brought the perspiration oozing down it. His linen was crumpled and displaced, and the spotless white of

his attire damaged. The odor of Macqueen & Ancram's was wafted into the room with him. But for the whisky he had had, it is doubtful whether he would have come on the errand that had brought him.

Dorothy gazed at him in much the manner she had at Brooks some three months before. He came straight towards her.

His advance made her get up quickly, and cross the room with swift haste.

"My God, darling, there's no need to be afraid," came out in a burst of agonized feeling.

There was a very young and childlike air about her as she stood, slim and white, with loose, long hair, and Ashby's flowers clutched tightly in her hand, trying not to show the terror that Harrison's abrupt entry and dishevelled condition had aroused.

The sight made him forget everything in pity and protection.

"Don't give your precious love to that villain, sweetheart. He's a downright scoundrel. As bad as they make 'em, for all his gentlemanly ways. He's not coming back because of you. He simply hasn't got the job. Try and believe me. I know him; you don't. I can't stand by and see him fool you. He wouldn't look at you except that you're the only white woman here."

The remarks reached Dorothy on an odor of whisky. How Harrison had come by the items he was relating she was too frightened to consider. It seemed to her there was nothing his low mind reverenced, no subject too sacred for his common voice to discourse on. Indignation rose above fear.

She faced him, haughty and trembling.

"I think you must be mad."

The accusation steadied him. His own conduct of the evening returned with a rush, making him realize how much notice would be attached to anything he might say.

"I think I've been mad for a whole fortnight, Dorothy," he said quietly. "A mad, blind fool with no thought in the world except that you smiled on me. You were angel enough to overlook what happened in London, to treat me as you do some of the others out here. I've loved you almost ever since you came, and was grateful for your kindness. Then these last two weeks you seemed to like to be with me. Being the sort of man I am, not used to a lady's ways, I must go and think you loved me, and then be a brute to you when I found I was mistaken. I've been through a lot because one woman wasn't what I pictured her, and I thought I'd made the same mistake again. I didn't know what lay at the bottom of it then. It's asking too much, isn't it, if I ask you to forgive me, to overlook what happened this evening, to let me have back a bit of the friendship that was mine until then?"

He watched her imploringly, breaking off and crushing the heads of lavender heaped in a bowl on a little table beside him. There was nothing in his mind but how to save her from the result of her own inexperience; to gain her confidence again, and, when that was assured, give her an insight into the character of the man on whom she evidently set such store.

Dorothy looked at him disgustedly, noting every

point of him, his heated, dishevelled appearance, clumsy figure, the coarse red hand that fingered her gift, his general air of a semi-intoxicated workman.

A gust of wind wailed out from the forest, lifting the blind screening the back window, stirring the muslin of her white dressing-gown. It brought the scent of the crushed flowers to her, and the odor of stale whisky; but nothing of what Harrison was suffering—only his drink-laden breath.

He read the verdict before it came. It seemed to him that all he was trying to bring about was receding from him—that his own stupid behavior would leave his charge at Ashby's mercy. The wild idea of appealing to Vickers occurred to him; to confide in the Chief of the Police episodes of the commissioner's past, known only to himself, and get the captain to show up Ashby in his true light. It was evident that all that Alondi had to say about the commissioner had not prevented her from falling under his fascination.

Then the recollection came that Vickers was his (Harrison's) staunchest friend, that she would guess who was the instigator, and judge accordingly. There was no one else in the district he could apply to whom she would allow to touch on such a personal matter. Pride and inexperience were to be her undoing.

"Don't be too hard on me because I didn't understand," he said hoarsely.

Dorothy did not waste words on him. She was smarting under his insults; aghast at his presumption; trembling with indignation at his reference to Ashby.

This was all on her face as she looked back at him with scornful eyes and quivering lips.

"Will you please go at once?"

Harrison's world was very dark just then. He wanted something to bring a touch of color into the vista of gray that lay before him; for he saw he had offended beyond pardon.

"Only forgiveness, darling, and I won't ask for nothing more," he said imploringly, in distress falling back into the speech of his youth.

The endearment and grammatical lapse roused all the antipathy for his class that was in the girl. She had suffered a lot at his hands. There was no forgiveness left in her.

A glance of contempt was cast at him.

"Will you go at once?"

"Dorothy, don't——"

Her voice broke in on his entreaty with increased sharpness and anger.

"Go at once."

His eyes met hers with all the abjectness of a whipped cur in them; then he turned and went from the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

By way of change and variation, the various members of Macqueen & Ancram's took weekly excursions down to the port to see after the consignments of goods sent out to them from England. Being the most junior member of the firm, it was not often this little relaxation fell to Green's lot; once in three months at most.

Eight o'clock one February morning found him seated on a wooden box in Alondi station awaiting the arrival of the down train.

Alondi station was not a place of great pretensions. It comprised a foot-high platform of red clay, about five yards by four, surrounded on three sides by forest, through which ran a track to the stores and mines behind. To the left stood the stationmaster's bungalow, a mere shelter of split bamboo and thatch, the bottom story of which did duty as ticket office, goods depôt, waiting and luggage room.

The train came gliding leisurely out from a haze of shimmering distance, to halt amidst hubbub and confusion by the platform.

Green seized a small handbag that was beside him, and deposited himself in one of the compartments of the carriage reserved for Europeans, settled himself in a corner, with his luggage on the opposite seat, a brightly colored magazine and a

neat packet of refreshments, given him on leaving the hospital beside him.

The magazine and a trio of cigarettes occupied his attention until lunch time arrived. A quarter of an hour was devoted to the consumption of half a dozen tongue sandwiches, two thick slices of cake, and a bottle of still lemonade. When these were disposed of, he stretched his length along the seat, and sleep claimed him until the port was reached.

On arriving there he betook himself to the hotel. having got rid of the accumulated dust of the journey, he pursued his way down to the beach, to a trio of huge corrugated iron sheds, in search of the consignment of goods that had arrived at the port with that morning's steamer. Going through these, arranging with porters, and seeing them transmitted safely to the station, to be put on rail for Alondi the following morning, occupied him until well after seven o'clock.

When all this was completed to his satisfaction he returned to the hotel, and entered the dining-room in quest of a well-earned dinner.

The room was a big, bare place with a collection of small tables, sparsely populated, and with half a dozen or so black waiters, attired principally in odd cast-off garments of European origin, fighting and scrambling around a counter where the various courses were being served out.

As he was passing up the room towards a corner where he had noted an acquaintance, a voice hailed him from a table set under an open window close at hand.

"Well, Kippers, and how's the world at Alondi?"

This brought him to a sudden halt. The cultured, languid tone was one he knew very well. He advanced towards the speaker with outstretched hand and ingratiating smile.

"Never thought of seeing you here, sir. Had clean forgotten you were due back to-day. Oughtn't to have done so, though, for Miss Gale told me only last night. Jolly glad to see you. Hasn't Miss Ashby come back this turn?"

Ashby took the outstretched hand in the affable manner that made him popular with his inferiors.

"My sister's not coming back this trip. If you've nothing better to do you may as well 'chop' with me."

The old acquaintance was forgotten in this new invitation. Green seated himself, glancing round the room in a hope that the assembly had grasped the fact of whom he was dining with.

Ashby poured out a glass of champagne for his guest, watching him with idle amusement. Green toasted his host's return, taking the draught at a gulp. The glass was filled up again, and for a time the two chatted of London and all that was happening there.

Ashby had landed with the mail that morning, just too late to catch the train up to Alondi. His port friends were away; a long day of his own society had left him a trifle bored, glad of any distraction. He filled the youngster's glass again, then broached local topics.

"So Miss Gale told you I was returning to-day?" he said casually. "Who told her, I wonder?"

Green was laying himself out to entertain to the

greatest extent within his power, calling up every item of Alondi news that he considered would be of interest.

"Vickers. She and him ain't as thick as they were when you went away?"

"I thought they were sworn friends. What's happened to make them fall out?"

"I guess it's because of Harrison. He's been on the booze worse than anyone in Alondi. Made an A1 fool of himself all round."

The remarks moved Ashby to laughter.

"'The Reformer' will be losing his character if he's not careful."

"Did, pretty nearly. Vickers took him in hand. Lived at his place almost. Never let him alone. Pulled him back to scratch gradually. Harrison's himself again now, except that he's a good stone lighter, with a temper sharp as mustard."

The empty glass was filled up again.

"But what has that to do with Miss Gale?" Ashby asked.

Over the brimming rim Green winked at his host.

"Always had an idea he was sweet on her," he replied when the contents were finished. "She used to go out with him a bit after you left. Not much, an afternoon a week perhaps. Seeing the country. She's great on that. Just before Christmas they got thicker. Out with him nearly every day somewhere. Always a 'Keep off the grass' way with her when she was with him that she lost a bit just then. Must have turned his head. Forgotten the danger signals, and come an awful smash. Christmas Eve they were up at Vickers' for dinner. I went as far as

our place with 'em. Eyes on her the whole time. Looking as if he could eat her. Midnight he turns up at our place. Starts sucking away at whisky. Stood no end of jaw from Dickson and never said a word. Just hopped out."

He stopped short, proud of his flow of eloquence and stock of information, looking across at his host for approval.

"Well?" Ashby said encouragingly.

"Since that night Miss Gale hasn't hardly spoken to him. Looks at him as if he was dirt any time they drop across each other. He looks at her as if he hadn't a cuss in him, ready to lick her boots. Alondi says he popped the question. Went on the booze because she wasn't having any. Vickers thinks more of Harrison than of all the rest of Alondi put together. That's why she and him ain't the pals they were."

Green imbibed his fifth glass of champagne slowly, watching his host with a fond, maudlin air.

"We're all right in our way, Harrison and me," he said with a slight hiccup, "but we ain't exactly her style. Nice and smilin' to us as long as we stick to the path. But she don't allow no trespassing. I don't mind telling you," he went on with lowered voice and confidential mien, "that she'll be jolly pleased to see you. I saw the stack of lavender you sent at Christmas. She wouldn't say where it came from. Got red in the face when I asked her, and tried to turn it off. Trust me to ferret it out. Waited until she had gone to dress. Then smelt round. Found a note lying in with the flowers. Read it, you bet," and he winked, prodigiously.

Ashby surveyed him with disgust.

"You young skunk! I hope you had the decency to keep the contents to yourself."

Green said nothing, but sat regarding his glass lovingly.

CHAPTER XXIV

The glow of waning afternoon sun was on Alondi, casting a sheen of gold over the landscape. On the hospital veranda Dorothy sat in the lavender gown that, since Ashby's departure, had been kept away in careful seclusion so as to be fresh on his return.

Up from the valley drifted the shrill whistle of the incoming train that would bring him back to the district. The little clock in the sitting-room chimed four. She turned to the tea-table, set with extra care and daintiness, that had on it the sandwiches and sweets that the commissioner had always shown a preference for. There was a nervous tremor about the hands that lighted the spirit lamp, and made several unnecessary alterations in the arrangement of the dishes on the table.

Dorothy sat down again, in an attitdue of indifference, with an open magazine on her knee, and an eye on the table, ready to waft off any insect that dared to settle on the array of dainties. As if by common consent the town had avoided the hospital that afternoon.

Ten minutes passed. The singing of the kettle said it was on the verge of boiling. She lowered the light with fingers not quite under control, for the flame went out altogether. With a nervous laugh at the stupidity of her action, she relighted the lamp, and then sat listening for any footsteps the rising wind might bring.

Some little time later a sound made her look up with a rosy flush, that changed almost immediately to suppressed disappointment as Green's face loomed up in the stairway.

She turned her attention to the boiling kettle so as not to let it be thought she had been expecting anyone else.

"I waited tea for you," she said, as he came along.

Dorothy little knew how Alondi had linked her name with that of the commissioner. Isolated as she was, none of the conjectures concerning herself and Ashby ever reached her ears. The place was buzzing with excitement over his return; heavy bets were on as to how long before an official engagement would be announced.

How Harrison came by the items he had related that Christmas morning, Dorothy had been too alarmed and indignant to take into account at the time. She had come to the conclusion that jealousy and intoxication were responsible for his outburst against the absent commissioner. The next day the news of Ashby's pending return had been verified by a letter from the Governor to Vickers. By the time she came to consider the matter calmly, the intelligence was common property.

She had hardly spoken to the Mussatti manager since that occasion. Dr. Hart needed no supervision. Harrison had avoided her as strenously as she had him. She thought of him only with anger and disgust, which the exhibition he had made of himself, during the first few weeks after Christmas, had increased. In her heart was a hope that Ashby

would soon take her beyond Harrison's jurisdiction, that she would not have to wait for her two years' agreement to be completed before being rid of his supervision.

Green sat down beside her, gossip, as usual, on his lips.

"Dropped across Ashby down at the port last night. Had dinner with him. Ripin' time. No side about Ashby. Traveled up with him. Vickers met him at the station. Hauled him off to Government House 'one-time' to see about something or the other."

Dorothy experienced a sudden easing of her acute disappointment. Ashby's non-appearance was accounted for. She poured out tea, glad her lover was a man of the type who could put duty before personal feelings.

When the meal was over Green sat talking of all he had seen and done during his brief stay at the port, until the arrival of the mail roused them. There were half a dozen letters for the girl, but none for the boy, whose correspondence was very limited—an occasional letter from the aunt who had taken upon herself his upbringing.

He watched Dorothy's budget eagerly, agog for the comments and extracts that usually fell to his share.

She went through the pile, picking out one that roused her curiosity—an official-looking missive addressed to her at her late hospital, forwarded from there to her African abode.

"What can this be about?" she exclaimed.

Green's inquisitive eyes were on her as she opened

it and drew out the contents. Inside was an envelope with the original address in her own writing; but now scrawled back and front with addresses to all parts of the world, and a blue mark and initial showing that, finally, the Post Office authorities had opened it, after a fruitless search for the owner.

The letter she had sent to Australia months before!

Surprise and dismay made it fall from her hands.

Green picked it up quickly.

"Well, I'm blowed! It's for Harrison!"

A hand was stretched out for it immediately.

"Give it to me, please."

He gave it back at once, watching her curiously as she put it into the official envelope and started opening another letter. There had been a note in her voice that he had grown to know, that said the subject was not one she was prepared to discuss, one of the "danger signals," in fact, that he had learnt to make his pace by.

Dorothy had but little idea of what was in her other letters; they were opened and read mechanically, but her mind was in no condition to grasp their contents. The knowledge of her behavior in connection with the affair in Lower Thames Street had come back with a rush.

She wished Green would go and leave her to think out the undreamt-of contingency.

As she showed no inclination to enlighten him on the subject of the letter, he got up. With a sense of relief she watched him disappear down the stairway. Then the letter was drawn out again,

examined back and front with minute care. The idea of sending it to England and getting one of her sisters to forward it, anonymously, suggested itself. Then she recollected that Green had noted the address. Pride would not let her ask him to keep the matter secret. And the whole time conscience was pointing out that the only honorable course was to deliver the letter as soon as possible to the rightful owner, with apologies and explanations—a task rendered most difficult by all that had passed between them.

Twilight found her still trying to gather together sufficient courage to be able to act up to this course. The knowledge that Green had seen the letter, and that, in all probability, the subject would be the first to be broached should he and Harrison chance to meet, helped to hurry her decision. She had no desire for the latter to hear the news from any source save herself; it would savor of still further cowardice on her part, and might bring the idea that she dared not face him.

This clinched the matter.

She got up and went to her bedroom. One of the trunks was opened and a leather box taken out. In this lay the white velvet case that had once roused the curiosity of a custodian at the British Museum—a gift that had been kept in the hope of finding "Watson's" whereabouts, and returning it to him, and which subsequent events had made her keep locked away very securely.

With this and the letter grasped firmly in her hand, she set out towards Harrison's premises.

On emerging from the grove she met him. He

would have passed with nothing more than the raising of his hat, except that her voice reached him.

"I want to speak to you," she said.

He stopped at once, scanning her with furtive anxiety.

"About a letter you ought to have had months ago, and I'd no idea you hadn't until just now," she began, with courage born of desperation, and then paused not knowing quite how to continue.

This was unintelligible to Harrison. He had been prepared for a very different statement, the idea of which had haunted him since Christmas—official notice to the effect that she was leaving the mine. The thought that she might do so, and go wandering off alone to some other outlandish part of the world, had kept him in a state of purgatory. As it was, whatever happened here, he at least would be at hand in the hour of disillusion.

He watched her searchingly, wondering what had made her in the nervous, worked-up condition she was.

A thick wreath of soft wet mist was wafted out from the forest, crawling through the gloaming like a great white snake, curling around them with a stealthy, sinuous movement. The air was heavy with dew, that dripped down, like the patter of rain, from the trees of the undergrowth below.

Before she had time to explain things further he spoke.

"You'd better come up to my office and say what you have to say, not stand about here in this damp and mist."

There was a noticeable dearth of cordiality in his voice, caused by a desire not to err in the opposite direction and increase her agitation. Dorothy's utterances were choked entirely by his surly manner. She made a step forward, more with a wish to escape his fixed gaze, so as to be able to collect her thoughts together, than actual knowledge of where she was going.

Nothing was said until the office was reached. She watched him as he lighted the lamp, noting his clay-bespattered working attire, the streaks of mud on his bare arms and smeared across his forehead, the ingrained dirt at the roots of and beneath his nails, just as he had come from some investigations at the mines.

The hands holding the letter and velvet case started to tremble. He had never seemed quite so removed from her own sort, quite so much in the condition in which she had first seen him. Everything was forgotten except what he would say. She made a desperate clutch after dignity, trying to choke back the nervous tears that seemed as if they would well up in spite of her desire to the contrary.

When the lamp was lighted, Harrison drew out a blue-spotted handkerchief, and wiped his face and hands and arms.

"You'd better sit down and say what you have to say," he remarked.

No attempt was made to comply with his invitation; instead, a letter was put on the desk beside him by a hand that shook visibly. He picked it up, noting it had been addressed, originally, in the small, fine writing he had got to know very well

during the past few months, to an estate near Melbourne he had once owned.

For a moment wonder as to how she had come by an address that had not been his for the last eight years, and why she should have written to him, kept him staring at it. He opened it. Inside was a note in the same fine writing, and a faded soiled letter.

The sight of the latter made him start violently. It was opened, and the contents drawn out by a hand that had lost a great deal of its habitual steadiness. He gazed at the sheets in amazement, put them back in the envelope, read the brief note, then looked across at the girl, who was watching him in a proud, frightened manner.

"Where did you get this?"

There was a cutting sharpness in the question that nearly succeeded in driving the last remnant of coherence from her. In a confused rush came out all that had happened that night in Lower Thames Street, told in a voice that stammered and broke and repeated itself at random.

It was a moment before he could make head or tail of the jumble of sentences. Their meaning left him astounded.

"You mean I gave you this? That you were with me that night?"

A very shaky affirmative was given.

"Then why on earth didn't you say so at the time?"

The question shattered her remaining scrap of self-control. One of the tears that dignity had so

far succeeded in keeping back, trembled out on to her lashes.

The sight made Harrison forget the strained relations between them.

"There's no need to cry, little woman, I'm not going to scold you. Sit down and tell me why you acted in the way you did."

Very meekly Dorothy took the chair that was drawn out for her. A voice that was suspiciously shaky related all the little incidents that had combined to make it impossible for her to act according to her conscience.

Harrison said nothing until she had finished.

"You'd have saved yourself a lot of worry if you'd told straight away," he remarked at the conclusion of her confession. "And me a lot of misunderstanding," he added a trifle drearily.

He was watching her in a tender, comprehending way. The incidents were not such as would have made him swerve from the path of duty, but he quite saw how it came about in her case. The inborn shrinking from anything approaching notoriety made her, in his estimation, all the more to be desired.

Since the rejection of his suit he had become possessed of a keen perception of all that passed in Dorothy's mind concerning himself. The further she receded from him, the more accurately could he gauge her nature. He knew now that her dislike for him had been based on something more than his first unfortunate mistake in London; that it would have been there just the same had their first meeting taken place in Africa. It was a natural antipathy

for his sort and species, the result of generations of forbears of gentle birth and breeding, that made her instinctively shrink from all who were not smooth and polished on the surface.

This discovery had shown him exactly how to deal with her, and brought the searing knowledge that, but for his brutality to her, and the glamor of Ashby's fascinating personality, he might have been able to break down the barrier of this antipathy. With this removed, understanding her as he did now, and by bringing all his strength of character to bear on her, the attaining of his desire would have been but a matter of time and careful steering through the rocks and reefs of pride that screened a timid, sensitive, clinging nature.

"What was the man like?" he asked presently.

It was said as if her answer were a foregone conclusion.

She described the assailant to the best of her ability.

The brief description brought no comment, only a further silence.

The mild manner in which her confession had been received steadied Dorothy's nerves. A desire to have done with the matter seized her. She got up, handing him the little velvet case.

"That's yours too, Mr. Harrison," she said with some dignity.

He took the jewel case, opened it, and contemplated the brooch. It had cost him nearly the whole of a quarter's advanced salary rather more than a year ago. A wry smile twisted his lips. A vision

of himself as he must have been on her first inspection of him passed through his mind, making him realize that the gulf between them had always been even greater than he had imagined.

The jewel flashed back at him, mocking him with its promise of good luck.

Dorothy's voice broke in on his brooding, with all the chill note back in it.

"I'm sorry you didn't get your letter sooner. I hope there's nothing in it that matters because of the delay."

His eyes rested on her in a jealous, hungry, sullen manner. The jewel case was snapped to viciously, and thrust into his pocket with a savage gesture.

"There's enough in it to hang Frank Ashby."

The statement, in its baldness, struck Dorothy with the force of a sledge-hammer. She stared back at him aghast and horrified.

A tense, strained silence fell on the little office. Wafted up the hill, with the moan of the rising night wind, came a negro voice raised in some heathen melody, fugitive, wild, and haunting, full of unspeakable sadness; it was soft with the splash of tears, throbbing with hopeless longing, heavy with despair —the wail of the accursed, the song of the son of Ham. It crept into the room, sobbing itself out in the corners, filling the air with an aching melancholy.

The wild chant, with its burden of hopeless misery, made the girl shiver.

"I don't believe you," she said.

He laughed mirthlessly.

"I never thought you would."

This calm acceptance of her disbelief brought

more chill in its train than any amount of argument or explanation.

"I don't believe you," she said again.

Her repeated statement fired Harrison.

"Ask him, then, since you won't believe me," he said savagely. "Tell him I've got Kingston's letter about the Ruganei affair, and hear what he has to say. My God, I wish I'd made him swing years ago! I would have but for the sister. The damned pair of them have stolen every bit of sweetness from my life."

Dorothy watched him with eyes that grew ever wider and more dilated. Then she turned away swiftly, with a desire only for the truth.

CHAPTER XXV

A BLAZE of light showed up on the highest point of the Alondi settlement, the first time it had shone there for the past few months, announcing to the town that the commissioner was in residence again.

The fact did not appear to bring any great joy to Ashby as he sat alone on the veranda, with coffee and liquor beside him, smoking a cigarette with an air of glum resignation, contemplating the scene before him.

The note he had sent Dorothy at Christmas occupied a considerable portion of his mind. He cursed her carelessness for having left it where it had come within Green's range. In all probability the contents were now common property. If he did not steer carefully, there were men in the place equal to bringing him to book concerning his intentions towards her. With her alone to deal with, he knew, no matter how he might deceive her, pride would keep her quiet on the subject. He determined to slow down a little until he had found out how much of the note had become public. This reason had made him decide to postpone his visit to the hospital until the following day, when a dozen excuses that would satisfy her could be made for not coming sooner. By then he would have found out the temper of the place, and thought out a way of extricating himself from the complications his tacit proposal and her carelessness might have given rise to, without deny-

ing himself the pleasure that could be extracted from seeing how far a girl of her type would go in the throes of a fascination. Also, if possible, at the same time to probe, judiciously, a matter that worried him.

A light step roused him from his reverie. He glanced round, then got up quickly, with surprise, amusement, and an easy smile of welcome on his face.

"Why, 'Sweet Lavender,' what has brought you here? I was just coming over to see you."

There was a breathless, hurried look about Dorothy, and a big triangular tear in the pretty lavender frock, as though haste had wrenched it mercilessly from some bramble. She came straight towards him, love and anxiety on her face. Harrison's statement had left her with no thought but for her lover.

In distress her own feeling were unveiled.

"It's not true about the letter, is it?—or anything he says?" she panted breathlessly.

Into Ashby's mind flashed a variety of statements in connection with herself and him perhaps not strictly within the bounds of truth, but which, considering the months that lay before him, he was prepared to back to the best of his ability.

He laughed, watching her teasingly.

"What's not true, little innocence?"

"He said . . . said there was enough in it to hang you. The letter I gave him. The Ruganei affair."

Most of the careless laughter died from Ashby's lips. For the first time it occurred to him that her visit was based on something more than the note

he had sent at Christmas, and the fact that he had not gone straightway to see her as perhaps its contents had led her to expect.

"I don't know what you're talking about, little girl. Sit down and tell me quietly. Something is distressing you more than I care to see."

His manner calmed her, making her realize that Harrison's outburst might have been nothing more than jealous ravings.

She seated herself on a lounge, looking up at him nervously.

"I . . . I ought not to have come, but what Mr. Harrison said made me forget everything."

There was the least unsteadiness about Ashby's fingers as he took a cigarette from a box on the table beside her, watching her with a smile full of tenderness not quite in keeping with the calculating look lurking in his eyes.

"What has that boor been doing to upset you?" he asked.

"It was a letter that . . . that he got to-day. He said there was enough in it to . . . to hang you. But he's always saying things against you." A smile trembled on her mouth, as she glanced at him. "You don't know anything about Kingston's letter, do you?"

"Unfortunately I do."

It was said so quietly, and with such a note of hopeless resignation, that Dorothy just looked at him, unable to believe her own ears.

He laughed bitterly.

"Have you never wondered, 'Sweet Lavender,' why I went away without telling you I loved you? I've

been under a cloud for the last ten years. As black a cloud as any man could be under—suspected murder. All because I wouldn't let a woman be thrashed to death. With only my word to disprove the version Kingston started before he died. No one out here knows anything about the Ruganei affair but Harrison, and I've lived in dread that he would tell you. I didn't dare myself. I couldn't bear to lose your liking."

He stopped, watching her despairingly. She stared back at him too aghast to make any comment.

The explanation went on.

"I'd no intention of killing the man. It was a pure accident. I had a post in Burma at the time, the man was a native official in the district. Once on passing his place I heard a woman screaming. I scrambled over the wall, and saw him beating his wife unmercifully. Without a thought I sent him flying. He never got up again."

Ashby paused as if waiting for some encouragement, before continuing his story.

As nothing was said, he went on, in a hoarse, weary voice, and as if with an effort:

"Kingston, the commissioner, hated me. The man was a protégé of his. Kingston refused to believe my statement, swore I'd been tampering with the woman, and that the husband had caught me. Kingston's cry was, 'Justice for the natives.' There had been one or two cases of the kind he made this out to be; he wanted a scapegoat, or, as he said, an example. He swore he'd do his best to get me hanged for it. He would have done it too, but he died before he had time to gather together sufficient

evidence, as I thought. It appeared he had managed to get enough false evidence to condemn me, and had given it to Harrison, who had been staying with him at the time, to take to the authorities in England. The letter was never delivered. Harrison met my sister and fell desperately in love with her. To save me she promised to marry him, making herself the price of the letter. Just before the wedding a lot of his valuables were stolen, including that. She broke off the engagement and we lost sight of him. Then we met out here. And now the letter has cropped up again. And Harrison hates me worse than ever, and hasn't a scrap of affection left for my sister, so she can't save me this time. There's no one to keep his mouth shut now, so a woman's scream in the end will hang me. And just when a glint of paradise has come into the wilderness that holds me."

With a gesture of quiet despair he turned away, standing by the rail, grasping it with hands that had the tightness of agony.

Dorothy was petrified.

The fact that Harrison's news was actually true, that he had it within his power to hang Ashby, brought a chill that left her frozen. She saw it all now, the reason of his downward career, why Mr. Harrison had never liked him, why he held one of the poorest posts the service offered. Even if he drank, as Alondi said, it was not surprising.

There was nothing in Dorothy's mind just then but how to ensure her lover's safety; how to get the condemning letter from the man who hated him. As she stared out at the vista of moaning darkness it seemed as if night had fallen on the world for ever.

Her action might hang the man who loved her; who had been too honorable to tell his love, to ask her to share a blighted life, yet who had refused promotion in order to be near her.

Her whole heart went out to him in worship and adoration. The fervor of her first love endowed him with every god-like attribute. Her belief in his integrity was unshaken. His confession left her braced up with the faith of a martyr in her cause, and lifted her to the plane on which she imagined he stood. In that rarefied atmosphere the whole case passed before her, each item he had told her reviewed with a hope of finding a way of escape for him. One by one they were marshaled, considered, ransacked, and dismissed as hopeless.

Then, like a blaze of light, came a way so simple that she almost laughed with sheer relief.

A light touch roused Ashby.

"Why didn't you tell me before, dear?"

He turned with quick eagerness.

"You believe me, don't you, little innocence?"

"You know I do. I'd do anything to save you."

He drew her to him. Her face was pressed against his shoulder, and her arms went round his neck in a clutch that was all love and protection.

The night sighed on, groaning under its burden of blackness, flinging writhing, tortured arms against a lowering sky. Heavy dew splashed down from the trees shading the bungalow, like tears wrung out of the agony of the night. The wind moaned through and around the balcony, bringing the sigh of the forest, swaying the hanging lamps, making their moving light give a distorted, deceptive view of every-

thing, lifting a girl's soft hair caressingly, mingling its sob and wail with a man's voice, low and tender, whispering into her ears.

Presently a small white face, full of pathos and resolve, came out from its hiding-place and looked at him wistfully. The trustfulness of her gaze seemed more than he could meet. He drew her head back on his shoulder, so that her eyes could not reach him.

For a minute or two she stayed there, then, without a word, she drew away from him and went swiftly along the veranda.

Ashby showed no immediate desire to follow after the fugitive. Instead, he watched her speculatively until she reached the head of the stairs.

Then his voice came down the balcony.

"Dorothy!" he called sharply.

The quick light feet increased their speed.

He went to the top of the steps in time to see a lavender gown disappear into darkness.

"Dorothy!" he called again.

Only an echo answered him. The night had swallowed up the slim girlish figure with its light grace and fluttering draperies.

He made no attempt to search for her. Instead he went back to the lounge in a curiously thoughtful mood. A handkerchief was lying there. This he picked up. It was small and smelt of lavender. As he looked at it a rather peculiar smile played round his mouth.

And out in the damp mist of a treacherous tropic night Dorothy was hurrying through a tangle of wilderness, with no thought in her mind but how to ensure his safety.

She had heard his voice calling after her, and had plunged into a side track, off the beaten route, lest he should overtake her and demand the reason of her hurried flight. Thick dew-ladened cobwebs caught and broke across her face; brambles plucked at her gown and left puckers and rents; caught in her hair at times and brought little drops of red oozing on to the fingers that removed them in frantic haste.

The knowledge that Harrison's statements were really true, had left her too distraught to do more than consider how Ashby could be saved from the result of an action that so coincided with her estimate of him, the false deduction of which she had been the means of giving back to the world.

Her face was a study of resolve and self-sacrifice as she appeared on Harrison's balcony, rousing him from his musings.

It had not occurred to him that she would go straightway to find out the truth of his statements. Her white, strained face, torn, dew-sprinkled frock, and look of breathless hurry told him at once the mission she had been on.

He got up and went towards her.

"Well, what did he tell you?" he demanded brusquely.

The gist of Ashby's explanation was given in a voice that pained him by its note of unshaken belief. He had always known what little chance she would have against one of the commissioner's calibre. A dull rage seethed within him at the fact of the other having deceived her so thoroughly, bringing in its train, more acutely than ever, a desire to guard and shelter her.

With slow deliberation he knocked the ashes from his pipe before replying, watching her with eyes that held protection and pity.

"So he told you that, did he? And you believed him. You little fool! Can't you see 'rake' written all over him? Have you eyes for nothing but his good looks and manners? My God, that the world should breed such men as him and leave such women as you alone and unprotected!"

The cold ferocity in his tone told all his hatred for the one whose life lay in his hands, and helped Dorother's resolve as nothing else could have done.

"Will you give me the letter——" she began with quiet determination.

"By hell I won't!" he broke in savagely. "I'll see him swinging first."

There was only one word in this that she grasped. It brought her suggestion out without break or hesitation.

"I'll marry you if you will."

This astounding proposition left Harrison speechless. For reasons of his own he had no intention of divulging the contents of the letter to the world. He knew enough of Ashby's past and character, to make him glad of a means of keeping him from haunting the hospital in the manner he had done prior to his departure to England. The contents were merely to be held over his head as a threat if he made any further advances towards the girl that was his, Harrison's, charge.

"Do you know what you're talking about?" he said, with an effort.

The proposal was repeated in the same quiet, set way.

A look of pain crossed his face.

"You love the villain so much that you'd go that length to save him?"

No reply was deigned. He laughed drearily, watching her as if he hardly dared think her proposition could be taken in earnest.

"Suppose I take you seriously, Dorothy, and say you can have the letter at the price you offer?"

"That is what I want you to do."

The dislike, resolve, and haughtiness in her tone stung him. He was full of gall and bitterness at Ashby's victory; angry with Dorothy for her blindness, yet knowing their two natures sufficiently well to make every excuse for her. Above all he was ravenous for the love that had been denied him, that seemed so far beyond his reach that the mere husk of it was seized on greedily.

"By God, I will then!" he said passionately.

The fact that her suggestion had been accepted, and Ashby was really safe, left room in her mind to contemplate what her sacrifice entailed. The indifference and hauteur on her face could not quite hide the dread she had of Harrison in his new capacity. Her eyes rested on him with a strained look in their softness.

He was attired just as she had left him, except that the clay of the mines had been removed. His checked cotton shirt was open at the throat, displaying a thick, muscular neck, his sleeves were rolled up well beyond the elbows, showing hard, brown, knotted arms that had a look of polished oak.

Dorothy had experienced a little of the coarse power of these, but she knew nothing of their strong protection; she was blind now, as she always had been, to the honesty of his rugged face, the straightforward look in his keen eyes, and the stubborn pride that prevented him from wearing attire more in keeping with the position he held, since she had been pleased to class him as something beneath her consideration.

His voice broke the silence.

"You've not had any dinner yet, have you?" he said gently. "Sit down and I'll get you something."

Dorothy obeyed mechanically, and sat watching one light in the blur of the misty purple, until Harrison's return.

On the table beside her he placed a small tray on which was a glass of champagne and a couple of biscuits spread with caviare.

"Try and drink this," he said quietly, watching her steadily, with none of the ardent love that had been on his face on the evening of his proposal.

She took the glass obediently. The draught brought a little order into the chaos that had surrounded her for the last two hours. For the first time since Harrison's announcement of what the letter contained, came the remembrance of all that had happened on the occasion it had first come into her keeping. Certain little coincidences kept her riveted. As she contemplated them, a vague, sick anxiety grew up in her heart. Judging Harrison from her estimate of him, it seemed to her that, if her suspicion had had any foundation, he would have been the first to give the name of a possible author of the

assault to the police. That he had not done so, pointed out it was but a case of coincidence. But the suspicion lingered, gnawing into her being, leaving her aghast at her own imagination for suggesting anything derogatory to her ideal. She tried to put the thought away, but steadily and persistently common sense laid the whole case before her, showing her other shadowy similarities, until the pain of it was intolerable.

That Harrison might be capable of screening a man he disliked for the sake of the woman he had once loved, because that man was all that stood between her and penury, did not enter Dorothy's mind.

He leaned against the rail, watching her intently, making no attempt to break the silence.

All at once she looked up at him.

"It wasn't Frank who . . . who attacked you that night, was it?" she asked.

Harrison's gaze wavered under the strained anxiety in hers. He moved uneasily. His eyes took in the slight figure, the small face watching him with a look of stifled dread, the limp, listless hands. Until now he had had no idea of the strength of purpose that lay in her, nor the extent of her belief in the other. He had dealt one blow that night, not realizing at the time how much it would injure, and the outcome of it had shown him a way of guarding all he treasured. It was not in him to deal another, knowingly.

"Whatever made you think that?" he said a trifle thickly.

A flush of shame spread over her face. The look of open relief that his question caused, showed how

easy it was to delude her, making him more than ever glad of the right that was now his.

Her eyes went to the light on Government Hill with dreamy wistfulness. The sight rubbed Harrison on the raw. He crossed to her chair, bending over her with an air of ownership. A massive gold ring, of barbaric workmanship, with a big red stone in it, was placed on her knee.

"I want you to put this on, Dorothy," he said. "Just to remind you that you are to be my wife, and your thoughts must be all for me now."

The ring was picked up by a hand that trembled visibly. She put it on her finger—the emblem of the compact between them—and stayed looking at it.

CHAPTER XXVI

Never since Green's installation at the hospital had Macqueen & Ancram's been favored with a sight of him, once he left the store at night, until after first breakfast the following morning. But, just after eleven, on the evening of the commissioner's return, his unexpected entry roused a select poker party congregated in the dining-room of the store.

He burst in on them with an abruptness that brought all attention to him immediately.

"Hello! What's up?" a dozen voices asked.

"Miss Gale's engaged to Harrison."

Twelve pairs of eyes expressed astonishment and disbelief. A babel of questions ensued.

Green seated himself, exhilarated by the excitement his announcement had caused. Half an hour's wait at the hospital, until Dorothy had retired and allowed him an opportunity of slipping away without her knowing, had kept him on tenterhooks lest the information should reach the store by another channel than himself. The way in which his news had been received satisfied him that his was the first intimation of the affair.

"Ashby's 'Sweet Lavender' engaged to 'The Reformer'! Why, she hates the sight of him!" Dickson exclaimed.

Green smiled complacently, well assured of the truth of his statement.

"It ain't so easy to tell who she likes and don't like," he said, with the air of one well versed in the ways of the lady. "Got up to the hospital to find her and Harrison sitting side by side like a pair of love-birds. She looked round as I came along. 'Kippers, I'm going to marry Mr. Harrison,' she said."

"You mean to say she's taken him on after the beast he made of himself at Christmas!" Dickson broke in. "And after Ashby'd as good as asked her to marry him!"

"If Ashby's gone on her it don't say she's gone on him," Green said sententiously, feeling the audience was his. "Though I expect it's thinking she was that sent Harrison on the booze. It ain't the ones she smiles on most that she likes the best by a long chalk. Though he's the last I'd have fixed on for her; but there's no telling. She ain't the sort to let the world see who she's sweet on. You could have knocked me down with a feather, though, when she said she was going to marry him. 'Get out,' I said when I'd got enough breath. She laughed. 'I'm going to take your place as guardian,' Harrison chipped in. 'Miss Gale has promised to marry me a fortnight to-day.'

I just stood and looked at 'em. She didn't look at him or at me, but straight down at her hands. Then she said quite ordinary, 'I'll make the chocolate now.' —We always have that and biscuits as soon as I land up there.—Then she looked at Harrison, 'I expect you'd rather have whisky, wouldn't you? There is some in the dispensary.' I could see she was nervous, in spite of the calm way she tried to carry it off, and did my best to ease things. Harrison was as cool as a cucumber. As if he'd been engaged to

her for years. 'Take my tip,' I said to him, 'have chocolate. You can get whisky any day in Alondi, but not chocolate like Miss Gale makes.' She laughed again. He looked at her as if he hadn't ever had a whisky or a fight in his life, and froze on to my suggestion 'one-time.' "

Green paused for breath, revelling in the excitement his announcement had caused.

"She never said a word all the time she was making it," he continued, "except once; then she looked across at me. 'Very soon, Kippers, you and I won't be doing this,' she said. 'You'll be doing it for me instead, won't you, little woman?' he said, soft as butter. Then he started talking to me. She hadn't much to say. At eleven she got up as usual. He went with her to the sitting-room. I left 'em to do their kissing, and hopped off to tell you chaps. Who'd have thought of her marrying him! Ashby's more her style. Must have been that letter that made her and Harrison patch up their row."

"What letter?" was chorused.

Green described the incident of the afternoon, which he had had no opportunity of relating sooner.

"It was one she'd sent to him. Must have gone astray. It turned up this mail and gave her an awful shock. Saw his name on it in her writing. It was scrawled all over. Couldn't see more than that, she grabbed it so quick.

Dickson had a solution of the situation immediately.

"Harrison must have popped the question and she refused him. Then she thought better of it and wrote and told him," he conjectured. "He never got her

letter, so that's what set him on the booze at Christmas. She'd be too bally proud to ask him about it."

It seemed to the assembly a very feasible solution. Poker was forgotten as the unexpected news was talked over. Midnight was long passed before the party dispersed to the various parts of the township in which they resided, spreading the news as they went.

It reached the commissioner before sunrise, brought by a confidential servant. The announcement lifted the weight of care that had been on his face since the preceding evening, and resulted in some orders being given to the man, who departed promptly to carry them out.

Ashby went to his bath with a sprightliness that had not been with him since Dorothy's unexpected visit. Returning to the veranda, he drank his early tea thoughtfully, then retired to the room set apart for official duties. He wrote a letter to Vickers and a list of instructions to the native clerks who would be coming some hours later. Then he drew some unofficial paper from a pigeon-hole of his desk and started another missive—one evidently more to his taste, for his pen ran with fluent ease.

"I spent all last night thinking over what passed between us," he wrote, "and I can't take advantage of your love, 'Sweet Lavender.' I want you to think it over quietly; what it really means to you if I allow our engagement to become public. It means that the black shadow of my life will fall on yours also, that my disgrace will be yours as well. I forgot that last night when I allowed myself to declare my love for you. I forgot everything except my affection for

you, and that you returned it. And I want your love so much, to know it's mine, to let the world know it too, to show there is at least one who believes in me, to have your love to help and support me through my trial.

"I did not follow you last night, little innocence, when you left me so abruptly, because all these things began to dawn on me, and I feared the same thoughts had come to you also.

"It is not fair for me to let you put your hand in mine, to acknowledge me your chosen husband, unless you've had time to consider what you are doing. I'm nearly twice your age, with the best years of my life behind me, with a none too good record in the past, and disgrace ahead. And you, my darling, are only just a girl, with a short, white life behind you, and your best years to come—a future that must not be blighted by the shadow of myself. Much as I love you, I must think of the afterwards, of when you are left alone with only my disgrace, and the world looking askance. I can't let that be.

"It will be quite six weeks before the evidence Harrison sends to England can get back here and bring about my arrest. The news you told me gives me a chance to escape, but flight would only help to prove my guilt. I shall stay at my post until the end.

"Much as I long to be with you for my last few weeks of freedom, in justice to you I must not do it. I must give you time to think over all it means. I'm going a round of my district, as I would in the ordinary way a little later on. I shall be away three weeks, shall have started before you receive this. Whilst I'm gone think of all I've said. Then, little

innocence, if, on my return, you think you can face disgrace for my sake, I shall feel more justified in letting our engagement become known. If you feel you can't, darling, I shall be the last to blame you. —F. A."

This missive was folded, put into an envelope, and addressed to the hospital.

Before second breakfast Ashby had started on a survey of remote parts of the district within his jurisdiction. By lunch-time the whole of the township was aware of his departure, accounting for it by Dorothy Gale's unexpected engagement to the Mussatti manager.

The news of the commissioner's proceeding had roused in Harrison nothing more than a grim smile. He had been prepared for something of the kind, having guessed who had put the suggestion of an alliance with him into Dorothy's mind. Her unofficial visit to Government House—an item he guarded jealously—was known only to him.

Up at the hospital she lay face downwards on her bed, with no thought of the man she was soon to marry. Ashby's note was in her hand, all blotched and blurred by her tears. No suspicion that the news of her heroic course could have reached his ears was in her mind; only a feeling of relief that he had gone, and a hope he would not hear of her sacrifice before her wedding day, when the letter would become hers and his safety assured.

That he could have been aware of Harrison's devotion to herself never occurred to her. There was nothing in the world for her just then but the love and consideration his note breathed.

CHAPTER XXVII

For the next fortnight Alondi talked of nothing but the coming wedding; such an event had never been celebrated in the township before. During the days preceding it the couple were the cynosure of all eyes. They were voted remarkably undemonstrative, a feature that had marked the whole of their courtship and made their ultimate engagement a matter of such surprise to the community. They were never by any chance caught in lover-like attitudes, no one had seen a caress pass between them; but the settlement agreed the two had always been remarkable for their singular reserve.

Harrison received the congratulations showered on him with warmth and pleasure; Dorothy answered hers with a smile and a few stereotyped words.

Ashby's note upheld her during the weeks prior to her wedding as nothing else could have done. The day was more welcomed than dreaded, lest a rumor of her proceeding should reach him, and bring him back to stop her sacrifice before the letter was really hers and his safety ensured. The compromising evidence was to be given her on entering the little mud church in the valley, which she would leave as Harrison's wife, where the ceremony was to be performed by an English missionary, coming up from the port for the occasion.

Her marriage morning found her a little paler

than usual, with her most prominent feeling a wish that the day were over. The ceremony was to be followed by a luncheon at Harrison's bungalow, after which the couple were to take the afternoon train to railhead, to start from there for a week's camping tour into the wilds.

The high sense of duty in Dorothy was carried into her dealings with the man so soon to be her husband. On the morning of her wedding, every head of lavender lying in her drawers or boxes, or heaped in bowls in her sitting-room, was gathered together in company with Ashby's two notes and made up into a parcel. She took this and a box of matches and set off towards the forest, to a place about a mile away that had always been a favorite nook of the commissioner's, where he had taken her several times in the days prior to his departure to England, and where she had been very often during his absence, dreaming of his return.

It was one of nature's pictures in the wilderness—a little bit copied from paradise to show the power of God; painted by a wild hand in gaudy colors on a canvas of vivid green. A hollow in the hillside where a blue pond flashed back at a sapphire sky in a shimmer of molten gold. Out from the ocean of vegetation that whispered around, a tiny stream trickled, falling, in patches of foam and silver, down a straight, black rock, soft with emerald moss, aflame with red and orange lichen. It was lost behind a curtain of creepers, to reappear in a curve of limpid coolness in a little rock viaduct edged with maidenhair ferns, that led on to the pond. Clumps of slender bamboos drooped grass-like, pale-

hued leaves in the golden heat; groups of palms nodded feathery heads sleepily; and the glowing petals of a red acacia dripped down crimson rain in the sunshine. The ground was patched—pink, white, and mauve—with tiny flowing creepers, walled with a glare of shrubs that showed all the colors of the rainbow in their blossoms, the whole backed by the varied shades of green of the drowsy, sighing forest.

Dorothy emerged from the deep shade of the forest into this little oasis. There were two flat rocks by the pond that had served as seats on several occasions. To one of these she went, sitting there with the parcel on her knee, brooding on the turn events had taken. All the romantic visions of a life spent with Ashby were before her: how he had sacrificed promotion for the sake of being with her; how her fondness for the wilderness would have helped him to bear the monotony of a place he had no liking for; how her love had come as a solace to him in a world that had treated him so hardly; and the abrupt and different ending of her dream. There was no earthly element in Dorothy's feeling for the absent commissioner—it was a girl's first love, the due of the gods, worship and sacrifice only.

A long, hot hour was spent in dreary meditation. Then she got up. On the stone beside her she put the parcel she had been hugging. There was the scrape of match, a short, sharp crackle, and a faint smoke blurred the dazzling sunshine as all appertaining to Ashby was reduced to a charred heap.

Her eyes stayed on the black ashes long after they had ceased smoldering. The sun crawled on to the meridian, looking straight down into the clearing,

saying it was time to go and prepare for the wedding.

A couple of hours later Dorothy was seated out on the hospital veranda in her cream muslin gown, all ready with hat and gloves and veil on, and an open book on her knee, waiting the arrival of Vickers, who was to escort her to church and give her away.

His steps on the stairs made her glance round smilingly.

"You see I haven't kept you waiting," greeted him as he came along.

"Then we won't keep Harrison waiting either," he replied laughingly. "I passed him and King churchward-ho, as I came up the hill."

During the walk Dorothy talked to her escort in a way that left him envious of her cool bearing and outward unconcern. In spite of Harrison's strange lapse at Christmas and Dorothy's avoidance of him afterwards, their engagement had not been a great surprise to the captain, considering the tastes they shared in common and the comradeship that had been between them until then. Knowing them both as he did, he saw how easily a misunderstanding could arise. Circumstances said the mistake must have been on the girl's side, and she had atoned for it by consenting to this hurried marriage.

As the church came into view her flow of conversation stopped. The track was lined with rows of black faces, all chattering and smiling, agog to see a white man's wedding. Her eyes grew a trifle strained. She wondered what there was to be so pleased and happy over.

On entering the church—that day reserved for Europeans—Dorothy was aware of a crowd of people whom she knew; men from the railway and the stores and mines for miles around, but not a glimpse of a woman! A sense of dire isolation seized her. A wild wish to get away from a world that held nothing but men. Ashby was forgotten in fear of the unknown that lay before her. Up till now anxiety for him had kept at bay what her sacrifice really entailed.

It was brought home to her very forcibly as Harrison loomed up before her. Now the moment of payment had really come she began to realize thoroughly what it meant—the thread of her life was to be given into the keeping of a man who had once been a stoker; henceforth her course must be molded according to his desire.

His voice reached her. For a second time Kingston's letter was given into her keeping. She put it into her pocket mechanically. A haze descended, obscuring all but the man beside her.

Then a strange voice started talking.

In a dream Dorothy heard it all. She wondered vaguely why women should object to the word "obey" in the marriage service. It would be so much easier to obey Mr. Harrison than to love or honor him. What a loud voice he had! How big and red his hands were, with chips and scars and thick, ugly, common-looking fingers! Yes, she would obey him, she could promise that most faithfully.

Some one took her hand in a cool, strong grip that did not hurt in the least, yet she felt she could not get away. She was conscious of a broad gold band

glittering on the hand that was a prisoner, and that she no longer had any right to the name that had been her father's, that had come down to her from generations of well-bred, cultured forebears. She felt a being apart from her family, sullied by contact with the man beside her. She thought of Harrison as she had first seen him—an impression she had never been quite rid of even in their most friendly days—and the mud and mire that obscured his ancestry. A determination seized her never to let her people know of her marriage, to drop out of their lives entirely, not to bring upon them the disgrace of her union.

The notes of the harmonium roused her. She glanced round, wondering why it should be playing. The boy from Jhuna was seated there—the one who had been brought to the hospital the day she should have lunched at Government House, who had nearly died the night Dr. Brooks had tried to kill her.

He smiled at her.

Through the rising mist a well-known voice greeted her:

"Congratulations, Mrs. Harrison. You've got the best man in Alondi."

Dorothy looked round dazedly. There was a pleased laugh from just beside her.

"Steady, Vickers," a second voice said, "you can't expect my wife to answer to that name just yet. Now, Dorothy, little woman, you've got to sign this."

Her eyes went to a book the clergyman was holding. (Alondi church boasted no vestry.) There was but one entry on the sheet, all wet, in the big

strong hand with its slightly illiterate look that she had grown to know.

"Mark Harrison, 35," was all she saw.

He was standing quite close to her, shaking the ink down in a fountain-pen. With the acute preception that comes in such cases, she noticed a black drop went on his white coat.

"That'll make an iron-mold mark when it's washed," she said.

This wifely observation raised a laugh from those around. Harrison glanced at her keenly. The coldness and the tremor of the hand that had laid in his had not escaped him. He had seen her cool, collected manner under trying circumstances before. There were many traits in Dorothy he admired, but none more so than the pride that tried to hide her weaknesses. Her manner throughout their brief engagement, and the way she had borne herself during the ceremony, savored of the gentle dignity and good breeding that he had come to see were characteristic of her, that he had always wanted in the woman he picked for his wife. Never since he had been her acknowledged fiancé, by word or look had he been slighted in the presence of a third party; alone, she had ignored him by the hour, but the arrival of another meant an immediate recognition of his position. Because of her manner towards him in public, Alondi had no idea that anything but mutual affection had brought about their union.

Harrison's eyes followed hers, noting the ink-stain.

"Never mind that just now, little woman," he said gently. "I want you to sign this."

The pen was taken from him.

"Dorothy Gale, 24," came under the other name in a small fine writing that contrasted very sharply with the one above it.

"Dorothy Gale, aged 24. Dorothy Gale, aged 24," it repeated itself in the girl's head, like a line from a tombstone, as she gazed at the two names.

"They look quite different, don't they?" she said.

Vickers laughed marveling at her cool manner.

"The top one will be able to look after the bottom one all right," he answered.

She glanced at him wonderingly. Then the whole church seemed to bear down upon her. They slapped Harrison on the back, and shook her by the hand. She heard herself answering their good wishes, aware that her husband had drawn her arm through his and was making towards the door. There was blue sky, blazing sunshine, and the crowd of black faces again; then green shade and the red sand track leading back to Mussatti.

"You're tired, aren't you, little woman?" Harrison said solicitously. "I'd have saved you the lunch if I could, but they wouldn't let me off."

Half a dozen men joined them, making a reply unnecessary.

Throughout the walk back Dorothy chatted gaily to her various acquaintances, but with a feverishness that might have given a member of her own sex an inkling of the true state of affairs.

On reaching Harrison's bungalow she went to the bedroom that had been hers during her first night in Alondi, to remove her hat prior to luncheon. Her errand was forgotten, however, as she drew out the

compromising letter, and sat with it on her knee, regarding it meditatively. "Kingston's Letter. The Ruganei Affair," looked back at her with the initials of the man who was now her husband. The picture of him, as he had been on the occasion it had first come into her keeping, was very vivid before her. It brought a little sick shudder. She wondered if he would ever come to her looking as he had that Christmas morning; if he would get intoxicated as he had afterwards, and perhaps beat her—she knew men of his class did maltreat their wives. It would be so difficult to keep a brave face to the world through years of constant purgatory.

A knock and Harrison's entry roused her. She got up quickly, the letter falling to the floor. This he picked up, noting it was unopened.

"I want you to read that," he remarked, handing it back to her, "then you'll see just how that villain lied to you."

Dorothy took the missive from him, but did not deign to reply. Instead she turned to a table close by, where writing materials lay, and drew out a sheet of paper. A short note was written, slipped into an envelop and addressed to Ashby. Then, with the compromising letter in her hand, she got up and went to a shelf over the washstand where matches and a candle stood.

Harrison's gaze followed her speculatively.

"You must read that letter before you burn it," he said authoritatively, as she lighted the candle.

Evidently Dorothy had forgotten her resolution to obey him, for the missive was held over the flame. He watched her with eyes that held amusement, pity,

and toleration. When it was reduced to ashes he went to the table, picking up the note lying there.

"I suppose you want this sent to him," he observed dryly. "If so I'll see to it. I don't want the place talking about my wife sending notes to her discarded lover on her wedding day, so I'll send it in one of the firm's envelopes."

A red flush rose to her face.

"You may read it if you wish. I said nothing except that I'd burnt the letter."

"I never thought you had, Dorothy. It almost seems as if you try to put the wrong meaning on everything I say and do. I'd like to say now what I've been trying to make you see for the last two weeks, but you won't, being so down on me. That is——"

"What you have to say can be left until later on," she broke in coldly. "Just now your friends are waiting."

With that she led the way back to the balcony.

To the girl the luncheon proved both swift and leaden-footed. It was a relief to have it over, yet each passing moment increased the dread of the time that would leave her alone with her husband.

There followed the journey to the railhead, in company with the guests who were returning to their duties there. On reaching the terminus, a fresh shower of congratulations had to be responded to. The irony of it all bit into Dorothy very deeply. She wondered why they persisted in wishing her happiness, why it was not obvious to them that such a thing was impossible for her with such a man as her husband.

His voice penetrated the forced gaiety with which she had surrounded herself.

"Now, little woman, we must be starting. We've five miles to go yet, and shall only just reach the camp in time for dinner."

A dozen hands helped her into a hammock, which, with a quartette of bearers, was drawn up alongside of the line. All around was wilderness, pink with the vivid hues of approaching sunset. Close at hand was a clearing where a group of tin-roofed bungalows flashed like crystal in the rosy flood. Behind the train were gleaming metals—the narrow way of civilization that led back to Alondi and the distant port—before it, a straight cutting ran through a world of moving green, going some two miles deeper into the forest.

Along this the procession started, the railway men accompanying the newly-wedded couple until the end of the cleared way was reached and only a tortured native path wound on through the trees. The hammock turned into that. Holding on to the pole of her conveyance, Dorothy sat up to wave adieu to her friends, and stayed watching them until the wilderness shut out everything.

The journey went on in silence. The glow of an unseen sunset dribbled through the thick verdure arching the track. There were curtains of creepers draping the sides, so dense that they hid all that lay beyond. Now and again a break showed aisle upon aisle of columned distance all alight with a soft golden green and an occasional shaft of blazing yellow where the sun pierced through. The tree trunks were splashed with every color; their

branches hung with bearded moss and snake-like creepers. In the dim, gilded shade birds flashed in search of night shelter, like streaks of red and green and blue and orange.

As the procession went on Dorothy looked out for each break in the wilderness; just then her interest in the scene around made her forgetful of her own dreaded future. Harrison, silent and preoccupied, paced along at her side, making no attempt at conversation.

A mist came curling up, touched with the brilliant hues of the dying sun; it hung in the golden gloaming in little opalescent patches, banked itself up in the aisles, wound in and out of the trees in soft wreaths and festoons of color, caught and clung like cotton wool in their branches, decking the place with rainbow gauze as if to celebrate some festival —a kaleidoscope of color, elusive and ever shifting, its hues varying with those of the receding sun.

Gradually the glow died away to green, that became deeper and deeper till but the sparks of the fireflies livened the gloaming. The lull of the evening was on the forest. There was only the sigh of the rising wind and the rustle of leaves as feet disturbed them. Then out of the depths came a long, wailing howl; the whole place became alive —full of whispers subdued and sibilant. The trees groaned and creaked and sighed; bush voices called one to another; the air was filled with a myriad of winged night wanderers. A faint ghost light dribbled through the greenery, with an occasional spear of silver that said the moon was in the ascent.

Presently a little hum and murmur of human

sounds drifted in with the forest voices. Ahead loomed a great pool of silver, set in the midst of swaying black; a cleared space in the trees, where a trio of tents shone like domes of white brilliance. Dusky figures were silhouetted around a blaze of gold where smoke curled up and became a thin haze of silver gray against a moon-washed sky.

Dorothy slipped from her litter, went to a chair set outside one of the tents, and sat there, heedless of the beauty of the night, with thoughts only for her own future. If it entered her mind that the situation was of her own making, it in no way softened her heart towards the man she had married. She seemed to hold him responsible for that and also for the letter; that the letter did not owe its origin to him, and that he was in no way responsible for its contents, did not appear to have come into her consideration; in her mind the two had welded themselves into one. She looked upon Harrison as Ashby's enemy, the man who had spoilt her life.

A shadow fell across her, breaking in on her broodings. Harrison was standing beside her, in the solid, seemingly immovable way that was characteristic of him.

His eyes rested on her very straightly.

"You and I, Dorothy, must make the best we can of this job," he said. "You wouldn't believe anything I had to say about that villain, or even read the letter that might have opened your eyes. He wouldn't have married you. He'd only have made you the laughing-stock of Alondi. You're a proud woman, and you wouldn't have got over that. You've lived a quiet sort of life, you don't know

what the world is yet, you haven't learnt things can't always be taken at their face value. I'm going to see that you don't come to grief in the learning."

Harrison paused. If he had expected any reply he was disappointed: Dorothy appeared oblivious of him and all he was saying, a mood he had become accustomed to.

"I don't know what sort of a brute you think me." he went on. "I started off on the wrong tack with you right away in the beginning, and seem to have gone on wrong ever since. But there's going to be no more misunderstandings. I'm not the sort of man you'd have picked from choice, but for all that I'm not the beast you seem to think me. I want affection from my mate. Love's all that makes marriage holy. I know how much liking you've got for me. When you've seen a bit more of life you may find out things for yourself. Then perhaps you'll think better of me. If it never happens, at least I've got the looking after of you. Your not the sort of woman that ought to go about alone, there's too much trust in you. If you like to go back to England and be with your people, you can, and half my salary goes with you. If you'd rather stay out here, well and good. I'll keep out of your way as much as possible, only be with you enough to keep the place from talking. If you decide to stay out here, we'll live up at the hospital, since you're fond of it. There's nothing more to be said. That's your tent, little woman," he concluded, pointing to the one behind her, "and dinner will be ready in a quarter of an hour."

Without waiting for any reply he left her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Dorothy emerged from the wilderness realizing that in some ways she had misjudged Harrison, and knowing that he regarded her as nothing more than a foolish child.

During their brief engagement she had not been called upon to endure his caresses: she had imagined this to be because she had always kept him at arm's length. Subsequent events showed her that she had been mistaken; that he had never intended to be anything more than a guardian: that he had tried to let her see this, and she had been too prejudiced against him to understand his treatment of her.

After his harangue on the evening of their wedding, she had declared her intention of returning to England and earning her own living, and had refused his proffered allowance. He, however, had stuck to his stipulation. Lack of funds to carry out her own desires had resulted in her deciding to remain in Africa, since by that course she would still be in receipt of her salary as matron, and would not be under the obligation of taking money from him.

In spite of everything, at times, the novelty of the tour made her forget the circumstances attached to it. Harrison avoided her as much as possible: as

the camp servants were not connected with Alondi, there was no need to keep up appearances, and, except when the camp was moving, she rarely saw him.

As the days went on she had grown to look with dread on the idea of returning to Mussatti, where Ashby and an explanation of her conduct would have to be faced. In brooding over the matter in the long, hot days in the wilderness, what he might have to say of her high-flown action occurred to her for the first time since she had suggested matrimony with Harrison. She felt she understood what pain such a course as hers must necessarily inflict on an honorable and upright nature; that, to Ashby, disgrace would be preferable to the degrading of the woman he loved.

The last day of the honeymoon found her wondering whether she ought to have taken the matter into her own hands: perhaps she ought to have consulted her lover before making such a sacrifice on his behalf: yet she was glad that she had not, since she felt such a means of ensuring his safety would have been scorned.

On the journey down to Alondi she fortified herself against his anger with the knowledge of his safety. As the train drew up at the platform she got out, glancing along it nervously, half expecting to see him there ready to proclaim his guilt and the reason of her marriage.

However, there was no sign of him.

From Vickers, who was there to meet the returning couple, Dorothy soon culled the fact of Ashby's return two days after her wedding. From the

warmth with which the captain greeted them, and the casual way in which he mentioned the commissioner, it was evident that the latter had given no hint as to the reason of her marriage. She experienced a feeling of relief and hope that he would face the situation sensibly.

On arriving at the hospital, she went through the heap of correspondence lying on her sitting-room table, expecting to find some upbraiding note from her lover. That no such missive awaited her filled her with vague uneasiness.

Throughout the morning she went about her duties in a preoccupied manner, trying to account for his silence, which was not what she had expected.

Afternoon found her full of suppressed restlessness, momentarily expecting some message, or to hear his step on the stairs. Tea-time came and passed, but still no sign of him, no acknowledgment of her presence in Alondi.

All at once the thought occurred to her that Harrison might not have sent her note. Having no reason for her marriage with him, injured feelings, anger, and surprise would account for Ashby's silence.

For some time she stayed thinking over this solution, with hot resentment in her heart against her husband, for it seemed as though he were trying to lower her in the eyes of the man who loved her.

She got up restlessly. Putting on a hat, she left the bungalow, setting out towards the spot in the forest that was her favorite walk, wondering whether, for Ashby's sake, it would not be kinder

to let him think that she preferred an assured position with Harrison, to possible disgrace with him.

With these thoughts in her mind she went on down the hill. On gaining the valley, the sight of a tall, white-clad figure, sauntering along the path leading towards Macqueen & Ancram's, brought her to an abrupt halt, all but choked by the nervous flutter of her heart. She stood watching the distant commissioner anxiously, feeling she must explain the situation and let him know the reason of her union with Harrison.

On seeing her, Ashby's idle saunter increased a little. He came on with a suave, easy smile, full of condescension. His expression was not what Dorothy had been expecting; anger and upbraiding she had been prepared for, but not the look of bland patronage that was on his face.

It had the effect of depriving her of speech.

He halted beside her, watching her smilingly, and with no trace of the love that had worked her up to a pitch of martyrdom.

"Why, Mrs. Harrison, what a surprise you've given Alondi!" he said. "The whole place is talking about nothing but your marriage. I got back just too late to give my congratulations. May I offer them now, and wish you and your husband good luck? It's what my sister prophesied from the beginning."

Dorothy just stared at him. The suave, easy, patronizing tone held no hint of anything that had passed between them. It was the commissioner of the district doing a pleasant duty, congratulating

the mine manager's wife on her newly-wedded condition,

"Didn't you get my letter?" she gasped.

His eyes rested on her, cool and smiling.

"I had that some days ago," he responded easily. "I've been waiting for an opportunity of thanking you. It was really very good of you to take so much trouble over that little affair. Now, Mrs. Harrison, I musn't keep you. I can see you're anxious to continue your walk. Give my good wishes to your husband."

It seemed to Dorothy as if someone had struck her a stunning blow on the head, that made the scene spin and dance before her, leaving her sick and giddy and reeling. She looked at him as if unable to believe her ears. White and wide-eyed she watched him go, the world thundering down in ruins around her. Stars whirled in her dazed brain, making shapes and letters in the jumping haze.

"There's no one to keep his mouth shut now."

The sentence flared out before her, enlightening her now, as it had done on the night of Ashby's confession, but in a very different manner. Every word that Harrison had ever said against him rose up before her, leaving her shivering with shame and mortification. There was no mistaking the meaning of it all. She had served his purpose, and he had no further use for her. A wave of degradation swept over her, choking her with its nauseous flood, leaving her with nothing but a desire to get out of the world.

She turned quickly into the first forest track,

heedless of where it led, hurrying on into its matted maze, knowing that in its trackless expanse death could be found, unable to face life with her burden of shame and folly.

CHAPTER XXIX

Raddu, of Quah village, was a rubber collector by trade. His means of livelihood took him on tracks and by routes rarely trodden by other feet than his own. With the first glimpses of daylight, he had started out from his home on a very different quest from that which usually took him into the forest, having first sacrificed a fowl before the wooden idol in the mud and thatch temple in his village, so that the gods might direct his feet favorably.

He was a young man of large stature, as yet unmarried, whom civilization had touched but lightly, attired in nothing more than a loin-cloth, and a leopard's claw suspended from one ear. In Quah village was a maiden on whom he had set his first affections, a young lady with a grasping and miserly father, who demanded more payment—in cloth, colored lanterns, and gin—for his daughter than he (Raddu) had been able to collect together as yet. There was a rival in the field, and, if he were not quick, the girl of his choice would fall to the lot of another. A blessed providence had provided a possible means by which his bride might be obtained.

With darkness the night before, a Hausa policeman had arrived in Quah, sent by the white authorities in Alondi. In the market-square he had issued a proclamation that had sent every able-

bodied man out scouring the country the moment the blackness of night had become the faint gray of morning. Raddu wondered what she was like, this woman, the lost wife of the white man, that her husband should offer the price of six young girls for her recovery.

He followed the sodden path, splashing through shallow pools, pushing under banks of dripping greenery, all wet and drenched with the results of a tornado that had raged over the district the preceding night.

As he went along, Raddu, after the manner of his kind, sang an impromptu chant, telling of all the Hausa policeman had said officially, and more that had been given afterwards when the village entertained him in the headsman's hut.

"There is a white man," he sang, "with the chest of a bull and a voice of thunder, who dwells on the hill of Mussatti, in whose sight no woman of this country has ever found favor. But nine days ago he took to wife a daughter of his own people—a girl with the voice of a dove, the sweetness of honey, and the swaying grace of the swamp grass. They were wedded, and then they set out on a journey. For seven days Alondi saw them not. They returned to the hill of Mussatti. She went forth into the forest, and none have seen her since. Great will be the reward of him who finds her. She is a woman of worth, purchased with much cloth and gin from her father. Great indeed is the reward. They search, the men of Alondi and the men of Quah, but I, Raddu, have made sacrifice to the gods, and I, Raddu, shall find her."

There followed much as to how the still unearned reward was to be spent; an ode in praise of his bride to be, another to the discomfiture of his rival.

By midday Raddu's chant had ceased to echo through the forest. A broiling sun poured down, sucking up the remains of the night's tornado. All around was an expanse of wooded silence, so still and breathless that the fall of a twig sounded like the crackle of a flame. The negro had reached a place where six faint tracks met, one of which, if no mistake were made in its tortuous turns and crossways, led down to the railway line ten miles away, at a point nearly five miles above Alondi. He squatted on his haunches, produced a couple of plantains and a handful of nuts from his loin-cloth, and stayed there quietly munching in a preoccupied manner as he studied the tracks around him.

When this frugal lunch was eaten, the journey was resumed. He followed the narrow, creeper-lined path leading towards the railway, pausing at every crossway, looking for the least sign, such as a broken twig or a bough or creeper displaced, that might tell of a recent presence.

For nearly an hour he went along unrewarded. Then something caught his attention—a patch of white that showed up along a side-track he was passing. He went towards this very quickly.

It was a scrap of embroidery, evidently torn from the frill of a petticoat, now held in the thorny embrace of a bramble lying across the path. Black fingers picked it up. Heathen eyes knew it had no bearing on the natives of the country. There was

a grunt. Raddu followed along that track, alert for the least sign the forest might give.

Eventually a little clearing was reached, that gave a view of the blue sky above, and into which a quartette of tracks led. He examined the place carefully, but found no trace of a human presence. He went a short distance along each narrow pathway, looking for some clue, but, beyond the scrap of tattered embroidery, the tornado had swept away all sign of the fugitive.

He retraced his steps to the clearing again, at a loss which track to follow, for they went in entirely different directions.

There was a moment's pause as he stood meditating on the problem, gazing skywards for an inspiration. One greeted him. High up in dazzling space three black specks hung and quivered, and dropped and darted back again—a trio of vultures. Their actions kept him rooted. He watched them speculatively, knowing there must be something lying in the forest sufficiently alive to keep them at bay. A deeper downward swoop was taken. The negro started along the track that seemed most likely to lead towards the spot over which they appeared to be hovering.

Raddu was not the only one who saw the vultures. A couple of Englishmen, who had just turned into the railway line some miles away, noted them also. The sight made the strained look that had been in Harrison's eyes for the last two days deepen.

"Look at those brutes, Vickers," he said hoarsely. "They know where my little lady is."

A hand was laid on his shoulder in an effort at

consolation. No one knew better than the Chief of the Police the almost hopeless task of finding a lost person in a tangle of West African bush.

Ever since the evening of Harrison's return to Mussatti, when he had arrived up at the hospital for dinner to find his wife not back from her afternoon walk and none of the servants able to account for her absence, he had seemed possessed of a demon of strength and energy that had kept him on the move the whole of that night, the succeeding day, and the night had come again without any news of the missing girl.

Within an hour of her absence being marked the whole of Alondi had joined in the search. No one had seen Dorothy since her departure from home, except the commissioner, who gave evidence of having seen and spoken to her just beyond Macqueen & Ancram's factory—a fact that amounted to nothing, for from there all the various routes diverged.

For two days the country had been scoured; a heavy tornado on the second night had reduced the army of searchers to despair. The fauna of the district was comparatively harmless. Greater dangers than wild beasts were constantly in the minds of Dorothy's friends—malaria, and the effects of fatigue and exposure.

Vickers' eyes went to the hovering birds of prey. He made an attempt at consolation, that he knew to be but feeble.

"We mustn't give up hope," he said. "It's quite possible some of the natives may have found her and taken her to a distant village. You'll find

someone waiting with information when we get back."

Harrison said nothing. The two continued their journey, going for some little distance along the line, then plunging into the forest again, making for a village some miles away, in the direction of the hovering birds of prey, to find out if any news of the missing girl had reached there.

Disappointment awaited them. They retraced their steps back to the permanent way. On reaching there Harrison's eyes went to the sky, and the desperate look in them deepened.

"They've gone now," he said. "My God, I can't stand it!"

"It doesn't say anything has happened to her because they've gone," Vickers said soothingly. "Someone may have found her."

A harsh laugh went grating down between the aisle of trees.

"For God's sake don't do the consoler. I'd rather you shot me so that I could be with her."

Vickers said nothing more.

They went along in silence, facing the waning sun. The forest was still steaming with the result of the night's deluge. A thick mist curled skywards, and took on a faint lavender tinge against the hard blueness of the sky and the carmine of the great blurred mass slipping down towards a haze of green.

Harrison's eyes stayed on the colored mist. Since he had arrived at Vickers' bungalow with the news of Dorothy's absence he had rarely spoken, and then only with reference to her. His hard,

bronze face had gone all lined suddenly. Vickers gave an occasional anxious glance at him as he paced along, silent and brooding. It seemed to the captain that if the lost girl were not found alive there would soon be an end of his friend.

A mile was tramped without a remark from either. The sun slipped down to the green rim of the horizon, and lay there like a shimmering pool of molten gold, sending great fiery darts across the sky, blurring the hard blueness with pale yellow, mauve, and delicate pink. The light breeze that always heralded evening came moaning out from space. It brought a faint sound with it, wafted up the line, that became gradually louder. A wild, heathen voice coming from the forest, raised in some uncouth chant, triumphant and vaunting. It was a moment or so before either of the Englishmen heeded it. A negro voice wailing a song to disperse the silence of the wilderness was nothing unusual. It attracted Vickers' attention by its one repeated, unvarying refrain, but his knowledge of the Fanti was not sufficient to enable him to decipher its meaning.

"What is that nigger howling about?" he asked.

The question brought Harrison out from the depths of his black broodings. He paused for a moment, listening to the voice that came with the rise and fall of the wind.

"And I, Raddu, have found her! And I, Raddu, have found her!" fell on his ears repeatedly.

There was a brief, poignant exclamation, as he set off at a quick, heavy run, Vickers following.

Out from the forest, some hundred yards ahead,

a black figure staggered, walking with a weariness out of keeping with the triumphant song. There was something slung across its shoulders—a heap of tattered, muddy muslin, with a limp, shapeless hat, and a thick coil of matted brown hair that had leaves and twigs and moss of the wilderness in it. A small, white hand hung in a dead way against the negro's ebony back, and on it a thick gold ring flashed and glittered.

A hoarse shout from Harrison brought the staggering native to a halt. Raddu had had a full and detailed description of the owner of the lost wife from the Hausa policeman, and recognized him immediately.

He came on with a reassuring smile and delivered his burden into the eager arms held out for it. Personally, when he had come across Dorothy, tattered and moaning, lying face downwards among the leaves of the forest, he had not seen where her value came in. There was a surprising lack of solid flesh about her. In his opinion she needed much feeding to make her worth anything approaching the reward her husband was offering. However, the girl was the white man's choice, not his, and undoubtedly her owner seemed glad to have her restored into his keeping.

The negro watched Harrison curiously as, half-kneeling on the line, with Dorothy's head on his knee, he got out a spirit-flask and held a cup of brandy-and-water to her parched lips. It was sucked in with all the thirst of fever. When he had taken her into his arms her heat and limpness had told him at once of the malaria raging within.

There was a feeble moan and her eyes opened: all their softness had gone; they were hard and bright with fever. They rested on him fixedly. Through her delirium was the knowledge that the world she had set out purposely to lose had claimed her again. A hand was raised in weak anger, as if to push him away, and fell against his chest with a burning heat that struck through his shirt.

"You know me, sweetheart, don't you?" he asked hoarsely.

A tangled brown head fell back on his knee, and a delirious voice started raving in a way that made the haggard look on his face deepen. The suspicion that had been with him since her loss was verified. Knowing she had a knowledge of every track within a two-mile radius of Alondi had led him to think her straying had not been accidental.

He drew her into his close embrace, the hot, burning mouth pressed and smothered against his shoulder, before the gist of its babblings had become intelligible to Vickers, standing anxiously beside him.

"Go on, will you?" he said, "and let the place know we've found her."

"You can't carry her the whole way back, man," the captain expostulated.

"I can and will, by God! No one touches her but me. Get on, damn you!"

Vickers turned away, in no way hurt by the outbreak, which he put down to reaction from the strain of the past two days.

Night had fallen before the captain reached Alondi. The news he brought resulted in half the

township starting up the line with lanterns and a litter. There was hardly a man among them who had not passed through the hands of the girl at the hospital, whose dreary round had not been eased a little by her presence. The gloom her loss had caused, lifted. It was something to know she was alive, though all knew only too well that the result of her two days of exposure had still to be reckoned with.

The dancing yellow lights and the hum of their voices reached Harrison as he came along the line with slow, tired steps, jealously guarding a secret, known only to one other in Alondi, that an unhinged mind would have made public. Dorothy had temporarily ceased raving. A burning head lay on his shoulder in a fitful feverish doze. Close behind, like a black shadow, stalked Raddu, coming for the promised reward.

The noise of the oncoming party roused Dorothy. She started raving again. Harrison's hand went over her mouth as he scowled at the approaching men. His greeting was anything but friendly.

"Your damned row's woke her," he said savagely. "Leave the litter, and if you must raise hell, do it out of a sick woman's hearing."

The party dropped some distance behind him, abashed and shamefaced. Harrison laid his burden on the hammock, ordered Raddu to the foot, and, taking the head-pole himself, so continued the journey.

For the next few days Alondi talked of nothing but "The Reformer's" strange behavior. He had refused to allow Hart to see his wife, and had

forbidden him to come on hospital premises; he scorned the counsel of his friends who advised him to call up the Government doctor from the port; he insisted on nursing and treating her himself, on the score that his experience of malaria far exceeded that of the two medical men; he rarely left her side, and allowed none but the negro nurse admittance to the sick-room.

The place decided that his wife's illness had turned his brain.

Harrison paid no heed to the gossip. There was nothing in the world for him but the girl lying in the darkened hospital bedroom. Day and night he spent at her side, watching her grow ever weaker and more wasted, listening to a voice that babbled feebly of its love for another, of a disillusion that had come with brain-snapping suddenness, and a wish for death to blot out shame and folly. No ears save his ever got the gist of her ravings, and, as he listened, murder grew up in his heart at the thought that a man could be brute enough to deceive anything so gentle and confiding.

There was no fight on Dorothy's part against the ravages of the disease; she was drifting unresistingly towards the end she desired. For hours Harrison sat with her in his arms, crooning over her, smoothing her cropped head tenderly, whispering love and consolation into ears that had no heed of him, trying to instil the wish for life into her by his own passionate desire for her recovery.

Her voice was in his ears always; it followed him round during the brief minutes he snatched to attend to his duties.

Its feeble, pitiful wail was with him, blinding him to everything else, as he stood in the station, where a newly-arrived consignment of machinery had brought him from the sick-room. He had no eyes for the gorgeous flare of color around—the glowing gold and green and brilliant blue that made Alondi at times a place of flaming beauty. For him there was no color left in the world—only the moanings of a delirious girl he had tried to guard and shelter.

There was a dull, monotonous level about his voice as he superintended the unloading of the machinery. All mistakes passed unheeded. The gang of black laborers worked with a lack of energy very unusual when under his eyes.

A faint crimson dusk was creeping over the land by the time the machinery was all unloaded and on the way to the mines. Lost in a gray world of his own musings Harrison still stood by the empty truck in the siding, his hand clutched round a wedding-ring that refused to stay on the wasted hand of its owner.

A step along the line roused him. He looked round to see the commissioner. The sight brought a dull red gleam to his eyes.

"You damned villain!" he said savagely, as the other passed; "if she dies I'll shoot you."

Ashby went on, apparently oblivious of the remark. If he felt any qualms concerning his treatment of Dorothy, it was not shown in his manner. An idle flirtation had ended in a climax that had succeeded in ridding him of a letter that had haunted him for more than ten years. The fact of her being

Harrison's wife had made her an unsafe subject to tamper with, and she was not sufficiently interesting to be worth running any risk over. He sauntered along, mediating on nothing more than his own safety.

On the road leading up to Government Hill he overtook Vickers. The conversation turned on what was the main topic in the settlement—Dorothy's condition.

"His wife's illness seems to have made him a trifle deranged," Ashby remarked, when the Chief of the Police had inquired what the latest bulletin was.

The callousness of his tone surprised Vickers. He accounted for it by the enmity that had always existed between the two men, and that the sick girl's preference had been for the other. Gossip said she had had the choice of either.

"I'm not surprised," he replied; "Harrison's whole world is his wife. If she dies I expect he'll run amuck."

Ashby changed the subject rather abruptly.

During the next few days some uneasiness crept into the commissioner's languid manner. Alondi had almost given up hope of Dorothy's recovery. As her danger increased, Harrison had become more reasonable, and had allowed Hart access to the sick-room. The girl the doctor now attended had scarcely strength to moan; all the wild ravings that had fallen to Harrison's lot, weakness had hushed.

On the day of the crisis Ashby's uneasiness was very evident. The town accounted for it by the fact of his affection for the invalid.

Night came, bringing a sense of relief to all. The bulletin issued in the hospital had been favorable.

In a dimly lighted bedroom Dorothy lay with no knowledge of the relief her successful issue from the crisis had caused. She was hardly aware of what was going on around her, just conscious that the life she had no desire for had been forced back on her. Out from the mist of the Valley of the Shadow still clinging about her, a bronzed face showed—all lined and haggard—one that was vaguely familiar, though she could not have put a name to it just then. It looked so hurt and suffering, that, instinctively, she smiled at it in an effort to bring comfort and consolation.

The faint shadow of pleasure at his presence, brought Harrison bending over her eagerly, touching a hollow cheek with careful tenderness.

"You're going to get better now, aren't you, sweetheart?"

Dorothy was too weak to understand what was said. Her eyes closed again wearily.

There followed a week of the almost constant sleep that comes after acute malaria. A fortnight passed, but her hold on life got no firmer.

With her return to reason, Harrison's presence filled her with suppressed feverishness, to such an extent that Hart, fearing a relapse, had advised him not to enter the sick-room, except at his wife's express wish.

Dorothy was crushed with humiliation as she contemplated all that her ravings might have revealed to the world, her behavior towards Harrison, and the fact that her final piece of foolishness had

only resulted in her becoming an even greater burden to the man she had treated so badly. The days were one long, feverish dread that he would refer to the past—the mere thought of which left her shriveled with shame. She brooded constantly on her folly and humiliation, until forward progress was impossible.

Hart's voice reached the invalid one afternoon—as she lay, limp and listless, pondering on how her yearnings for a wider outlook had ended—talking to her husband out on the balcony, on the subject of herself.

"There's no chance of your wife pulling round here," she heard him say. "The climate's all against her. She'll simply lie till she drifts out of life. We must get her back to England. The risk's a big one, but it's her only chance of recovery."

Dorothy moved restlessly.

"Tell the master I want him," she said fretfully to the negress who now attended her.

The summons brought Harrison to her side very smartly.

"What is it, little woman?" he asked.

"I don't want to go to England."

The querulous, weary tone was one he knew very well now. He guessed that some portion of the doctor's conversation had reached her, and knew what lay at the bottom of her non-desire to return to England. It was brought home to him very forcibly by every mail. All her letters still came addressed to "Miss Gale," showing that no mention had been made to her people of the alliance she had contracted in Africa.

"You can't stay here, sweetheart," he said gently; "but you needn't go to England unless you wish. Grand Canary will do just as well."

Dorothy said nothing more. He waited for a few minutes, hoping for some further word from her, then went from the room.

With Harrison, deciding on a course meant immediate action. A homeward-bound steamer was due at the port the following afternoon. Before midnight all appertaining to Dorothy's departure the next morning was settled.

As he went about the details connected with her removal, more than ever was the desire for his squandered fortune; with that there would have been no necessity to send her in the charge of another, without his thought and care, when her hold on life was so frail that the least carelessness might shake it from her. He could not leave the mines; he was bound there by the strongest chain that holds a man—the knowledge that the comfort and well-being of the one he loves depends upon his efforts.

When all was done he came to spend the remaining hours by Dorothy's side. There seemed to be a death-like stillness on the earth that night. No wind stirred the forest, scarcely a moan or a call came from it. A flood of moonlight had swept away all life and sound; it streamed in at the open bedroom door, touching, with gentle fingers, the hollow face on the pillows.

Harrison crossed to the bed and sat there watching the invalid. Sleep revealed all her sensitive, shrinking nature, with its trust and weakness. She

lay so still and motionless that he touched one of her hands to make sure she was alive. As he did so, her hand moved as if in search of something firm to hold on to, then closed again in a weak, hot grip around two of his fingers.

The hold seemed to bring daylight very quickly.

Evening found Dorothy in a berth in the cabin of a rolling steamer, prostrate from the effects of the journey down from Alondi. Up on the deck her husband was giving instructions to the captain and doctor concerning her passage and accommodation in Grand Canary.

A sudden cessation of the noise and vibration of rattling cranes and winches, told Dorothy the time for the vessel's departure was close at hand. Harrison's entry roused her. He crossed to her side, kneeling there, watching her anxiously.

"You'll try and get better, my little lady, won't you?" he whispered. "I couldn't bear to lose you."

Her eyes came to his with the look of a shamed, heart-broken child in them.

"I don't want to get better. I can't bear to think how silly I've been."

Since her return to reason, no mention of the cause that lay at the bottom of her tardy recovery had passed her lips. He had waited anxiously for some such confession, fearful of what the result might be if he tried to force her confidence. The fact of her broaching the matter brought his hand on her head, smoothing back the short, fluffy hair soothingly.

"You mustn't fret your life out because you've been a bit silly, sweetheart. No one knows you

were fond of him but me, or that you went and lost yourself because you couldn't bear the shame he'd put on you. I nursed you through all your ravings; no one else laid a finger on you, or heard a word of what you said. He won't say a word about it. He knows me too well. You know I wouldn't let you be shamed before Alondi if I could help it, don't you?"

He paused for a moment, watching her tenderly.

"I always knew you'd find him out sooner or later," he went on. "And I wanted to have the looking after of you when the time came. I knew you'd take it hardly. That's one of the reasons why I married you when you gave me the chance. You weren't built to stand rough treatment."

His clumsy attempts at consolation soothed her a little.

Dorothy had learned enough now to know that all her husband said could be depended on. The fact of her having been his sole charge in the days of her fever, brought a mingling of shame and relief, with the latter rapidly gaining ground. The knowledge that her rank foolishness was known only to him, eased the weight of shame; that she still had his respect brought some comfort in its train.

Some of the dreariness died from her eyes. The big, work-stained hands she had always disliked, had lifted her out from the depths of her shame, and degradation, wiped her down carefully, and set her on her feet again, bruised and shaken, but clean and whole in the eyes of the world.

Nothing more was said until the ringing of the "All ashore" bell was heard, reaching Harrison

like the tolling of a knell. His hand went to his pocket, drawing out the wedding ring that was still in his keeping.

"Let me put this on again, little woman, will you?" he asked.

A wasted hand was held out to him. (Just then it seemed to Dorothy that the man whose name she bore set too high a value upon her.) Its weakness brought out all the choked up love and tenderness. He drew her into his arms, holding her pressed close against him, with his cheek resting on her hair.

She stayed there unresistingly, glad of the shelter, feeling for the first time the strong protection of his arms. It was as if a rough stone wall had grown up suddenly between her and the world that had used her so hardly; as if someone safe and reliable had come into the maze of folly and deception that surrounded her, someone whom she could trust, and whose affection was not pretense. It brought a little self-respect back to her, and a desire to make amends for the treatment she had dealt out to him. There was no pride left in her now, only gratitude, and a wish that she had confided in him sooner.

"I'm sorry I've been so horrid to you," a shamed voiced whispered. "I——"

His lips choked back further apologies with their tender pressure.

"You mustn't think about that, my darling, only about getting well and strong again. And try and think a little better of me too. I understand you better than you think, and we might get on very

well together if you'd let us. You're all I've got in the world, the only bit of flesh and blood that's really mine. I don't ask more than just to have the care and keeping of you, to know you're not drifting about alone, with no one to keep the knocks off you. Good-by, my darling and—God bless you."

Darkness had fallen by the time Harrison reached the shore. He stood on the beach unconscious of all around him, heedless of the passing time, watching the lights of the steamer until they disappeared over the horizon.

CHAPTER XXX

A GIRL sat alone in a corner of the shady garden surrounding a big English hotel in the Island of Grand Canary, watching a mail steamer up from West Africa that was just coming into the harbor. Ahead lay an expanse of deep blue sea joining in the distance with a brilliant sky. Around was the gentle sigh of a scented garden; palms drooped over a sea wall, from beneath which came the gurgle and splash of water breaking on a stretch of yellow beach.

This corner was a favorite one of Dorothy's, one she had grown to seek of late for purposes of solitary meditation.

Nearly six months had passed since she had arrived in Grand Canary. The first few weeks of her stay had been spent in one of the bedrooms facing the sea, whilst youth and the salubrious climate gradually forced health back on her. There had followed a long convalescence, spent propped up with cushions on a lounge on the public veranda.

The thin, frail-looking girl who had lain, day after day, with seemingly no interest in life, had become the center of curiosity to a little clique of men the hotel, all invalided up from West Africa. It had soon become known that she was from there also, and, after a short time, Dorothy found herself the object of much attention. She discovered that

it was impossible to lie and brood on the past, with half a dozen men anxious to amuse and entertain her.

Very soon she had a set of her own, and, as time went on, hardly a day passed without one or the other of her friends introducing to her someone connected with the parts she had come from; men of all grades of society, from a steamship's purser, to the Governor of one of the colonies, passing through the hotel on the way down to, or up from, their ports and occupations. All had a word of congratulation on her recovery, and a remark on her bravery at having ventured out to such a part as West Africa, and to so notoriously unhealthy a place as Alondi.

"That's Ashby's district," would be said disparagingly, at the mention of where she came from, to any one in Government circles; or "Ashby's your commissioner, isn't he? Please don't form your opinion of us all from him"; or similar remarks not at all complimentary to the Alondi commissioner.

Some went further, connecting his name with more than one scandal, saying the best London clubs had black-balled him.

His real character had been brought home to her very forcibly from many different sources, making her more than ever thankful that no one but Harrison had ever known of her affection for him. No man of his own station and calling had a good word to say for Frank Ashby.

The Ruganei affair was never mentioned. She wondered if this was because none but her husband

knew of it, or because the subject was not one for her ears. She realized how little she had really known or seen of the man on whom she had set her first affections. Traveling out by a German steamer, none of the everyday gossip rife in British Government circles had come to her ears. On landing in Africa he had been on the spot to render assistance in time of need. There had followed a fortnight in Alondi, spent in contemplating all he had done for her at the port. For the weeks prior to his departure the glamor of his handsome, polished exterior had blinded her to all else connected with him, and had made her disbelieve the vague rumors concerning him that had reached her. The months of his absence were spent in the worship of the image she had set up in her heart. Inspection of the whole case had shown her that she had formed her estimate of him on an act of common politeness, a dozen agreeable meetings, and a farewell that meant anything or nothing.

Many a time, aching with shame, she had gone over every item of that brief interview with Ashby on the veranda of Government House, when his declaration of love and the thought of his danger had raised her to a pitch of martyrdom. The extent of her foolish infatuation was very clear to her, and she now realized that Harrison's rough exterior held most of the good qualities with which she had endowed Ashby.

The knowledge of her husband's love and respect had been a soothing balm to her when thinking over all connected with the case. As the weeks went by, she had grown to welcome his letters, alive now

to the manliness and uprightness of the writer. There was no malice in her nature; that his summing up of Ashby's character should have proved correct, brought only the feeling of humility that errors in herself were wont to do.

She saw, also, that she had always been prejudiced against Harrison for what was really the outcome of her own behavior, and that this, and his low origin, had blinded her to his good qualities. None of her mistakes and shortcomings were ever mentioned in his letters; there was never anything there to suggest her judgment had been at fault. She had grown to see that this savored of all his dealings with her, that he had realized her pride and inexperience from the first, and had done his best to smooth the rough path she had chosen.

The odor of tobacco was no longer offensive to her; now, it always brought a recollection of the time she had been held against a smoky coat, safe in the knowledge that none but the wearer knew of her folly. The bundle of old clothes at the hospital had smelt just the same. The memory raised a smile that died away somewhat wistfully. Very often she found her mind dwelling on the kiss her husband had given her at parting, her eyes fixed on the ring that linked them. The shadow of the giver brought a sense of security such as she had not experienced since her mother's death—the same feeling of a power behind that could be appealed to if things should become complicated. All responsibility seemed to have dropped from her, leaving her free to wander in the land of her dreams with an easy conscience, for the first time in her

twenty-four years, knowing that no duties were being shirked in doing so.

The dreams grew to include more and more the author of this peace and repose. She explained to herself that this was because she was beginning to see that she ought not to take so much from him and give nothing in return.

Often as she sat in the cool shade of the beautiful garden, breathing in health from a balmy climate, it struck her that even at that moment her husband might be lying sick and ill, at the mercy of incompetent servants, even dead, taken with the awful swiftness of blackwater fever—the hazards of Alondi were constantly before her, multiplying and magnifying themselves in her mind.

A desire to know all connected with Harrison and the Ashbys had seized her. For some time doubt as to whether the relations in which they stood permitted her questioning her husband on the past, had prevented her from writing and asking.

Eventually this had been done, and now she sat watching the mail boat that, in all probability, would bring his reply.

Drifting across the bay with the whisper of the water came the faint rattle and clank of chains from the distant steamer. She watched the vessel anxiously, until the gray gloaming stole between her and it, wondering what answer it would bring.

Harrison's letter was in her hands some two hours later as she sat up in her room, heedless of the music and dancing going on in other parts of the hotel, eager only for what it held—to know if he

still had enough faith in her, despite her folly, to entrust the secrets of his life into her keeping.

The letter was opened with trembling hands.

"Alondi, *September.*

"My dear little Girl,—In your last letter you asked me to tell you all connected with the Ashbys and myself. It is not a pleasant story, and considering there is a woman in it, especially hard to tell you. But since you wish it, I will do my best to make it as brief and clear as possible.

"I met the Ashbys more than ten years ago, on board a P. and O. liner outward bound for Australia. They were going to Burma, where the brother held a post. I was barely twenty-six, had just made my pile. Business had taken me to England. For the first time I had got in touch with the women of the sort I fancied. Lilian Ashby is a striking woman now. In the days I first saw her she simply took me off my feet. I got no further than her face and figure, and gave her all the virtues I wanted in my wife. The news of my luck in the gold rush was common talk among the Australians on the vessel. The first night the brother made up to me. Before I had been twenty-four hours on board I had got what I wanted—an introduction to the sister. She turned me inside out in no time, soon knew what I expected of a woman, and played up to the rôle. Before the voyage was a week old I was mad for her. I wanted her to come straight on to Australia with me and marry me there by special license as soon as possible after we landed. She refused to do that, but consented to an engagement. What followed showed her reason was to make inquiries as to the stability of my fortune.

"We parted at Calcutta, she promising to come on to me in three months' time. Before that the brother had drawn on me to a considerable extent. I gave him money willingly: she had a way of refusing my gifts that made me glad to do it, saying I was all she wanted.

"I went on to Australia, nothing in my head but the woman I was to marry. I could not rest away from her. I started back to Burma by the next boat, without sending a cable of what I was doing, and went on up to Ruganei.

"It is more than ten years ago now, little woman, and the whole thing nothing more than a bad dream that cost me more than £200,000 to get rid of.

"It was evening when I landed up at the Ashbys' bungalow.

thinking of the surprise I was going to give the woman who loved me. There was a surprise all round.

"I found her in the arms of another man; saw her, as I came up the garden, kissing him—a woman I had parted with swearing fidelity to myself. I was not built to take that sort of thing calmly. I demanded an explanation. A further surprise awaited me. The man, Kingston, swore she had been secretly engaged to him for the last three years, that poverty was all that kept them apart. She denied every word he said. The brother backed her statements, said Kingston was always pestering her to marry him, but she had never looked upon him as more than a friend, that she had been a little kind to him that evening because he had been so cut up when she had told him of her engagement to me. Kingston denied it all, said he had never heard my name before, that he had no knowledge of her coming marriage. I left them. What the three of them had to say afterwards I do not know.

"That night a letter came to me, the one I gave you, from Kingston. It was all concerning Ashby, and the gist of it very similar to what he told you, except that he put quite a wrong face on it. Kingston had always kept him from his deserts because of the sister. The story it told was nearly a year old then.—Some Englishman had been intriguing with the wife of a native official of some standing in Ruganei; the affair had ended in the murder of the latter and all but a revolt in the district. The Governor of the province determined to sift the matter to the bottom; he was very much against his underlings tampering with the native women, owing to the dissension and bad feeling it caused, and very anxious for an example. Ashby had a none too good reputation in matters of the sort, and suspicion was fixed on him. He was questioned in connection with the affair, and declared himself innocent. There were native witnesses who said to the contrary. Kingston, his senior, defended him might and main, and eventually an alibi was established. The matter never got beyond a whisper, and the murder remained a mystery. In the letter Kingston sent me was the true story, how he had sworn falsely to save the brother of the woman he loved, and a whole list of natives whose false evidence he had bought, everything to prove Ashby's guilt and his own false swearing.

"Why Kingston should have sent the letter to me I do not know. What Ashby said to him after I left may have caused it. He was just recovering from a prolonged attack of ma-

laria. That, and the knowledge of his fiancée's deceit may have unhinged his mind temporarily. The next morning all Ruganei was talking of Kingston's suicide, which no doubt her behavior was responsible for.

"That same day Ashby came to me, asking me what I intended to do regarding his sister. I had seen and learnt enough of her during the interval to know what she was and why she had accepted my offer of marriage. I told him very definitely. He threatened to bring an action for breach of promise against me, said he was not going to have his sister made a fool of, that she had written to England telling of her engagement to me. I knew it was only my money they were after, that they were only a pair of adventurers. I offered him a good sum down to soothe his feelings, which he took without demur. Then I told him of the letter Kingston had sent to me, gave him one or two extracts from it. It did not need more than the look of him to tell me what had been mentioned in it was true.

"I had been very fond of the sister. I could not go back on her to the extent of giving evidence that would hang her brother, so I kept the matter quiet. That was the last I saw of them for years.

"I had been a clean living man up to then, and had a good name out in Australia. I changed that and started on a downward career, driven there by the unexpected ending of my dream. In less than five years I had run through my fortune and was back in the gutter I had started from. After that I knocked about the world in some of the lowest jobs it offers for a livelihood. The day before that affair in Lower Thames Street I ran across Ashby in the Strand. I must have been half silly with drink and fever, for I went up to him and reminded him of the days I had been his chosen friend on board a P. and O. liner, said I still had the letter that would end him. Seeing me in the state I was then, and knowing that I still had the evidence that could hang him, evidently made him think that any drunken freak of mine might reveal his guilt to the world. He must have followed me back to where I was staying. The next night I met him outside my lodgings, and he offered to buy Kingston's letter from me at a price that was wealth to a man in my state. That he intended to have it was very evident from what was happening in Lower Thames Street when you first saw me. I remember shouldering him out of the way, and walking on for hours, dazed and giddy, not knowing where I was going, with only the letter

and Lilian in my mind. Some one set on me suddenly, and I fought like fury, and remember nothing more until I woke up in the hospital.

"You asked me once, little woman, if Ashby was the man who had attacked me, and I made you understand he was not. Perhaps you would not have believed me then in any case. I had no intention of giving the evidence to the world. I could not bear to see that villain break your heart, and I knew enough of your nature to know that, married to me, you would try and put him out of your head.

"If I made a mistake with you first of all, it was not altogether my fault. You had a way with you in that London hospital that would have made any man think what I did if he had not known what was behind it all. But for thinking you had taken a fancy to me I might never have wanted to get up again. I owe my present position to your generosity. There were men who would give me a decent job on the strength of the name I had made in Australia, but I could not have gone to them in the garb in which you first saw me.

"Now, good-bye, little woman, and try and make the best of things as they are. Don't be afraid of spending money. I shall be getting a good bonus on the present half-year's working of the mines, and I like to think of you enjoying yourself.

"MARK HARRISON."

As Dorothy went through the letter, the bare, cleared hill of Mussatti rose up before her, with its heat and work and fever, and one man's constant effort to do his duty towards the firm that employed him, and all who came within his jurisdiction. The desire to help him, which had grown up gradually during the months in Grand Canary, was, at that moment, stronger than ever. In her last few letters she had laid great stress on her complete recovery, but in her husband's answering ones no mention had been made of her return to Africa.

She stayed brooding on this, for she realized from which side the first move would have to come.

CHAPTER XXXI

Mark Harrison sat out on the veranda of the hotel at the port, watching for the first sign of light that showed up in the blackness shrouding the ocean. He had come down from Alondi the preceding afternoon, in response to a letter that had reached him a week before, the contents of which had filled his mind almost to the exclusion of all else.

It was one in a handwriting he had watched grow stronger with every week's mail for the last six months—the only letters the post ever brought to him that were not of a business nature. A fortnight after he had received a cablegram from Grand Canary, announcing Dorothy's safe arrival there, the first had reached him. It had had but two lines and a signature, telling of a hand too feeble to do more than pen the merest duty message. As the hand grew stronger the letters had increased in length, eventually filling a whole sheet, saying all a girl was doing in a place more than two thousand miles away, in a pleasant, chatty style, as unexpected as it was pleasing, that had taken a lot of the sting of loneliness from his life. As he read them he had often paused to wonder if she had written to her own people yet, giving them news of her marriage. For more than a month after her departure letters still came in her maiden name; then they ceased, showing the change of address must have reached England.

The last letter he had received had been much shorter than many of the preceding ones, and its contents, considering it had come in reply to the unveiling of his past, had filled him with surprise, and something more that he hardly dared allow himself consider, lest he should be as mistaken with regard to her motive as he had been once or twice before.

This letter was drawn out and read again by the light of the lamp behind him. It was very brief and to the point.

"GRAND CANARY.

"MY DEAR MARK,—Now that I am quite well again I cannot put you to the continued cost of keeping me here. Since you have asserted your claim on me to the extent of refusing to allow me to return to England and earn my own living, I have no option but to return to Mussatti and take up my post there again, so as to be no further expense to you.

"I hope you are not working too hard because of me. I must have been a great drain on you for the last few months, but after this I shall endeavor to be no further cost to you.

"I shall be returning by the *Tarquah*, which leaves here a week today. You may not approve of the course I am taking, but it will be useless to cable with the idea of stopping me, because I shall have started before it could get here.

"DOROTHY HARRISON."

A smile hovered round his mouth as he read this childish note. Evidently he was to be left with no doubt as to what lay at the bottom of her action; the reason of her return was made very clear to him, so clear and emphasized, in fact, that it might be but an excuse to cover some other motive. He calculated that the cost of her passage out from Grand Canary and back again there, when the bare two months that now stood between him and his first holiday had expired, would cost him more than

if she had stayed on in the island until he joined her, as had been his arrangement, and spent a day or so in her society before proceeding to England alone. He wondered if the cost of her double journey had occurred to her when she had suddenly decided to be no further expense to him, and if she had considered that he could not leave her behind in Africa when his holiday came round; also that, on account of her long absence from Alondi, the post at the hospital was not hers to take up without the consent of the Mussatti Company. These facts could hardly have escaped her, and did not tally with the letter.

The restlessness that had been with him since receiving her missive increased considerably as the light of a steamer appeared like a pin-prick of yellow against the purple blackness of the distant rim of the sea.

An hour later he sat in a bobbing surf-boat that was rapidly approaching the *Tarquah's* side, peering up at the various groups silhouetted against the lamps on the steamer's lower deck, in search of the girl fate had given into his keeping.

Harrison marked Dorothy, some minutes before the gangway was reached, the center of a little crowd whom he knew by their appearance to be either Government officials or military officers—men of the class to which she belonged. The sight quenched a lot of the hope her return had caused, and made him mount the gangway with none of the eagerness that had marked his setting out from Alondi; for the girl standing there, tall and slim and proud-looking, was very different from the

shamed, heart-broken child who had lain unresistingly in his arms for a few minutes, glad of comfort from any source.

The lack of enthusiasm with which he mounted the steps, brought a look of covert anxiety to a pair of gray eyes that had picked him out, at once, from the mass of howling blacks in the boats crowding round the steamer's side. It curbed some of the shy pleasure that had been in Dorothy's face on first seeing him, and stopped the quick little rush with which she had been approaching the head of the gangway, changing in into a leisurely walk.

Harrison marked every point of her as she came towards him: that her bearing was more dignified, her attire more elaborate, the grace and elegance that always emanated from her more in evidence than ever. The clumsy feeling that her presence always brought seized him again. He was at a loss how to greet her, keenly conscious that her marriage with him was but the outcome of another man's treachery.

The thought filled him with bitterness that dried his mouth and took all speech from him.

Dorothy halted beside him, noting, with a perception unusual in connection with the man she had married, his hesitating manner, the look of suppressed pain in his eyes, also that he was wearing a particularly crude blue tie, a trifle crooked.

She laid her hand on his shoulder, watching him askance.

"You don't seem specially pleased to see me," she said, with a nervous laugh. "After I've come all this way to see you too!"

Then she twitched his tie back into position. As she did so, the flash of the big red stone in her engagement ring crossed his vision, leaving him wondering why she should be wearing that. He watched her furtively as she adjusted the tie to her liking, aware of a dozen pair of eyes fixed on them with surprise, knowing exactly what was in the minds of the onlookers—What on earth had possessed her to marry him?

She went on talking, conscious also of the watchers and listeners.

"I got tired of being in Grand Canary, so I thought I'd come and see how you were getting on, that you didn't work too hard in trying to keep pace with my extravagance. Because you said you were making plenty of money, I bought three new frocks before I left. This is one. I put it on specially for your benefit."

All this, in the face of the reason given for her return, brought his eyes on her searchingly. His direct gaze made hers drop immediately.

"Did you, little woman?" he said quietly. "I'm glad you didn't stint yourself for anything. Now, if you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll see about your luggage, then we'll get ashore."

His unenthusiastic reception silenced her. She watched him until he disappeared down the companion-way in quest of a steward and her smaller belongings; then, with a preoccupied air, she turned to bid farewell to the friends she had made during the voyage.

The same thoughtful look was on her face on Harrison's return, as she stood alone at the head

of the gangway, watching her boxes being lowered into the surf-boat that was to take her to the shore.

"Now, if you're ready, we'll be off," he remarked casually.

She went obediently down the steps and into the waiting boat. He watched her as she waved a smiling adieu to her friends on the steamer; then, as the craft pushed off from the vessel's side, the smile died away and she sat in silence.

In the faint starlight he studied the face beside him. There was a preoccupied look there, not the proud indifference usually on her features when fate left them alone together. The problem of her return filled his mind to the exclusion of the soft glamor of the scene surrounding him.

Around was a stretch of heaving indigo—each rising wave silver-crested. On the edge of the horizon, a blur of purple mingled with the clear, deep blue of a star-flecked sky. The dimly seen shore was wreathed with a constant moving mass of white, tossed high against the blackness of the land occasionally, in clouds of sparkling brilliance. From there came a boom of surf, rendered soft and soothing by a mile of space. The sea rocked the boat gently to a little crooning song of its own; the wailing chant of the negro crew rose and fell with the motion. The world was a place of haunting music, where stars swam in vaulted distance, reflecting themselves in the heaving sea around.

Dorothy's voice broke the silence:

"Isn't this better than any amount of civilization?"

There was a quick response to her remark, very

different from the stiffness that had marked their meeting:

"I think so, little woman, but my tastes are not everybody's."

The reply took most of the latent anxiety from her eyes. A smile was cast at him. This made him essay a remark of his own.

"Are you quite as comfortable as you can make yourself?" he asked, glancing at the flat wooden box on which they were sitting.

"I'm quite all right, thank you," a soft voice responded, with none of the coldness that formerly had answered his inquiries concerning her welfare. "I always forget all discomforts when I can see things like this," and a hand took in the whole of the faintly silvered, moaning space.

She lapsed back into silence, watching the night in a dreamy, contented manner. Harrison pulled a piece of folded tarpaulin between her and the hardness of the roped-in packages that formed the back of their seat.

The increasing roar of the maelstrom of surf roused Dorothy from her reverie. The first sickening upward heave brought her hands together in a tight, nervous grip. The thunder of the sea around drowned all sound. In the vague semi-darkness the whirl of water was even more terrifying than in daylight. Like snow on a moving mountain the froth on the crest of each oncoming wave glittered white and sparkling, as the great mass of water rose to a height that shut out the stars. The world had become one continual hiss and boom and surge and roar. There was a thundering crash that all

but shook her from her seat. Black arms tore her from the boat, ran with her up the beach, and left her there breathless and alone.

Out from the night Harrison's voice greeted her: "Why, little woman, you came through all that without a scream!"

"That was only because I was too afraid to make any noise."

This confession of weakness brought him to her side with all the eagerness of a lover.

"You sweet little coward! Why didn't you tell me so at the time, not now when all the danger's over?"

She drew away from him nervously, making him remember the ground he was on had to be trodden very carefully. He changed the subject to an impersonal channel immediately.

During their solitary walk up to the hotel very little was said. Midnight had passed before they reached the building, now even more silent and deserted than on the occasion of Dorothy's first experience of it.

Harrison's heavy footsteps echoed along the length of the dark hall as he took her through and up to the balcony above. Her mind was on the first time she had come that way, under a very different escort. There was no bitterness in her heart towards Ashby now, only a feeling that, but for him, she might never have appreciated the man with her.

His voice roused her.

"Here's your room," he was saying. "Would

you like a cup of coffee or anything before turning in?"

She paused with a hand on the swaying curtains, regarding him critically.

"Why do you crop your hair so short, making yourself look like an escaped convict?" she asked, ignoring his question. "And why will you wear such atrocities of ties?"

This unexpected attack left him abashed, staring at her apologetically, only too well aware of his own shortcomings, and how badly he compared with the men she had been with recently.

His expression brought a smile to her lips, soothing in its gentleness.

"There's no need to look so depressed. They are neither of them such very terrible faults. Now, good-night, and don't sit up too long smoking."

Before he had recovered sufficiently to make any reply, she was lost behind the curtains.

Harrison showed no desire to finish the evening with a pipe as was his wont; instead, he turned into an adjacent room. Once there he closed the door and drew the curtains. Then, by the light of a candle, he examined the hair and the tie that had given offense. There was a singularly happy light in his eyes as he did so. In his mind remained scarcely any doubt as to the cause of Dorothy's return. But, knowing her high sense of duty and all she owed him, the lingering fear was with him that it might be but an endeavor to repay him, irrespective of her own feelings.

He wanted more than that; to feel something stronger than debt or duty held her to him. In

any case her return said he had her trust and liking and respect. With that, and starting for the first time fairly, without prejudice or misunderstanding on either side, winning her affection was but a matter of time and patience.

CHAPTER XXXII

Dorothy found Alondi very little altered. The treacherous climate had claimed several of her old acquaintances, who now lay in the local cemetery, their places filled by new recruits from England; with this exception the only changes were in her old abode. That was no longer the hospital. The dispensary had been moved down to Harrison's late residence, and the big ward—now divided—had been utilized by him as office and bedroom. Her own quarters were just as she had left them, except that the passion-flower had sent down another tendril to coil and twist round the first that had waved across the back window of her sitting-room.

But there was a decided change in the atmosphere surrounding the couple now residing in the purple-wreathed bungalow.

The haughty silence that had marked Dorothy's former dealings with her husband was no longer there. She appeared to have developed a keen perception in connection with all concerning him. Since the unexpected criticism that had come on the evening of her return, her tongue had been scarcely ever off him. There was hardly any part of him that escaped unscathed. The way he stood, walked, sat, ate, even the very manner in which he held a spoon had been commented on. No one had ever taken such pains with him, or interest in him before, or en-

deavored to make up for the deficient training of his youth.

Harrison bore all her comments with surprising patience. From such a source he welcomed criticism, rejoicing in her interest in him, knowing there was a lot that had to be trained out of him before he ceased to offend her susceptibilities. With the same determination that had twice drawn him out of his original environment, he set about correcting all the faults in himself that she remarked on.

On the railway journey up to Alondi he had asserted his authority so far as to say that, in future, she would not be allowed to nurse a case except with his permission, nor was she to consider herself bound to attend to the dispensary. If she felt inclined to go there as a pastime, she was at liberty to do so; but she was not to make a work of it. Also he went on to say the Mussatti Company no longer counted her a member of their staff; their agreement with her had fallen void when illness had taken her from Africa. That this ought to have occurred to her before she decided to take up her post again, he had not mentioned.

He took her return so stolidly that Dorothy was nonplussed. She caught herself wondering if her final piece of folly could have alienated him; if he had only professed affection for her on the occasion she had left Africa, because of the comfort and self-respect he thought it might bring her; that, in reality, he only looked upon her as an encumbrance; but, since he had taken the charge of her upon himself, it was done in the thorough, altrustic way that was characteristic of him. She grew a trifle uneasy;

it seemed to her that he asked nothing more from the world than to be allowed to grub for gold in its surface. His conversation never strayed beyond the limits of friendship; his manner was always that of a guardian. Yet his letter replying to her questions concerning his past, showed he considered her entitled to his fullest confidence.

As time went on his attitude grew to occupy more and more of her mind. Each day gave her a further insight into his character. The glint of the lover she had seen on his face on the evening of her landing, grew to be her almost constant and most cherished thought.

One morning, about a fortnight after her return, as she was in the dispensary doling out drugs and liniments under Hart's supervision, thinking, as usual, of Harrison's present manner, Vickers's voice broke in on her meditations.

"Can I persuade you and your husband to come and have dinner with me to-night, Mrs. Harrison?"

She paused in her occupation and stood regarding him thoughtfully. Previous invitations of the kind that had fallen to her lot had been refused on a plea of not having settled down yet; in reality, because there was a possibility of meeting Ashby at the captain's bungalow.

Since her return she had not been off the mine precincts, except when with Harrison, for fear of coming across the commissioner. At the same time she knew a persistent avoidance of his vicinity, considering her former friendliness with him, might give rise to gossip. His reason for not visiting her was very plain to the community, in the face of the strained

relations that had always existed between him and her husband.

"I don't know whether Mark can spare the time or not," she said, after a moment's reflection. "The mines are very short-handed now; but I'll go and ask him."

Her voice reached Harrison in the depths of the sweltering engine-room, where the absence of the white engineer on his holiday made this post come into the many the Mussatti manager had to be prepared to fill when occasion demanded. It brought him, in a hot and soiled condition, from probing some hitch in the machinery—the rectification of which was beyond the intelligence of the negro engineer.

He came towards her, highly conscious of his own dishevelled state. His apparent sensitiveness about his disreputable appearance made her face very soft and sweet. Before he had time to apologize for his condition a tapering finger touched the black grease on his arm, and held the result up for Vickers's inspection.

"Mark delights in getting himself all dirty," she said, wiping the grease off again on her husband's shirt. "He's never so happy as when he's doing some one else's work, especially if it's anything to do with this grimy old engine. And he won't ever let me see him. Now I've caught him beautifully, grubby from head to foot."

Pleasure thrilled him at her touch, and at the thought that, at last, she was beginning to understand his feelings. It gave him a sense of the unity he had always wanted.

"Well! What is it now?" he asked, with just a

touch of impatience, anxious to get out of sight behind his engine again.

"I want you two to have dinner with me this evening," Vickers answered. "But your wife refuses to accept on her own responsibility."

Harrison knew exactly why he had been appealed to, and the situation an evening at the captain's residence might entail. The secret of Dorothy's marriage he had managed to keep very securely. He had no desire the least inkling of any of the circumstances that had led up to it should ever enter the minds of a community eager for scandal. A marked avoidance of Ashby might give rise to talk that would lead to a thorough investigation of all connected with the three of them.

"Then I must take upon myself the pleasure of accepting for her, Vickers," he said. "There's no turning out of boxes to keep us home now."

There was a great turning out of boxes, however, some hours later, as Dorothy set about a toilet that was to mark her first social function in Alondi in her new guise. Out on the balcony Harrison awaited her, going through the letters that had come with the day's mail. It had brought one, both pleasing and gratifying, addressed to "Mrs. Harrison," in the small, fine writing that resembled his wife's, and that, by the regularity with which it had come since her first appearance in Alondi, he guessed to be from one of her sisters.

The mail brought another letter that was also to his liking, for it was being gone through for a second time with an air of great satisfaction.

A slight movement behind him made him glance

round. He got up quickly, all forgotten but the girl coming towards him, ethereal in her misty gray draperies. As she halted by his side he touched the silky gauze draping her shoulders, with a finger that showed very red and work-stained against the fine whiteness of her skin.

"Is this another of the new dresses?" he inquired.

Her gaze was on the fastening of a bangle.

"Don't you think my extravagance will ruin you?"

He laughed, handing her the letter he had been reading, trying to catch the eyes that seemed bent on avoiding his.

"I can stand a lot of that. Read this, little woman."

She took the letter. It was from the Mussatti Company, offering him the post of manager at a mine of theirs in Ceylon, at a salary of eight hundred pounds a year, and a liberal bonus on the profits—a letter breathing approval, and praising him for the manner in which he had pulled round their West African mines, finishing with a friendly congratulation on his wife's recovery.

"They seem to think a lot of you," she remarked when the letter was read.

It was said with a note of dainty disdain, as if anyone appreciating him was beyond her comprehension.

"In any case," he replied, "I wouldn't let you come out here again. It's no place for a woman. If you like to go out there, well and good. The climate's altogether different, quite healthy. If you decide to go it'll only give you a bare month in England. They're anxious to have me on the spot as soon as

possible after my agreement here has run out. I've plenty of business that'll keep me employed in town whilst you run round and see your people."

Dorothy folded the letter up carefully, with eyes only for her occupation.

"I should think you might find time to come with me if you tried."

It was almost as if Harrison were dangling with his happiness, for he took the letter she was offering, avoiding her hand.

"If I let my hair grow a bit and get you to choose my ties?" he said teasingly.

She turned away, taking from Peter her shawl and shoe bag, which, however, were not offered to Harrison.

"It's quite time we were starting," she said, a trifle tremulously.

"Let me wrap you up first."

The lover in his voice brought a flood of crimson to her face. Without a word the shawl was given to him. It was wrapped about her by hands that went about their business carefully, and with lingering enjoyment.

The moment he had finished Dorothy started for the steps. Harrison quickly overtook her, drawing her arm through his.

There was a black darkness over the earth that night—a soft, warm, caressing fog. From somewhere on the mine came the muffled clank of swaying chains. Blobs of blurred gold were all that marked out the sites of the bungalows. The mist was gilded occasionally, and the trees ahead showed faint and shadowy, as the jumping reflection of a bonfire in the

native village shot out from between them in bands of pale yellow. The air was full of sighs and the sound of dripping dew. Not a face showed up, black or white, as they went together down the hill.

To Dorothy they were the only people in the world, and it was all-sufficing. No words came to break the spell of the soft tropic night. Only a hand held hers in a cool, strong, tender grip.

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THE HAWK OF EGYPT

a love story without asterisks

DAMARIS bowed her head so that the curls danced and glistened in the light, as the torrent of his words, in the Egyptian tongue, swept about her like a flood.

"Hast thou come to me in love, thou dove from the nest? Nay, what knowest thou of love? I ask it not of thee—yet—but the seed I shall plant within thee shall grow in the passing of the days and the nights and the months and the years, until it is as a grove of perfumed flowers which shall change to golden fruit ready to the plucking of my hand."

He pressed her little hands back against her breast so that the light fell full upon her face, and he held her thuswise, watching the colour rise and fade.

"Allah!" he whispered. "Allah! God of all, what have I done to deserve such signs of Thy great goodness? Wilt thou love me?" He laughed gently. "Canst thou look into mine eyes and shake thy golden head which shall be pillowed upon my heart—my wife—the mother of my children? Look at me! Look at me! Ah! thine eyes, which were as the pools of Lebanon at night, are as a sun-kissed sea of love. Thou know'st it not, but love is within thee—for me, thy master."

And was there not truth in what he said? May there not have been love in the heart of the girl?

Not, maybe, the love which stands sweet and sturdy like the stocky hyacinth, to bloom afresh, no matter how often the flowers be struck, or the leaves be bruised,

from the humdrum bulb deep in the soil of quiet content. But the God-given, iridescent love of youth for youth, with its passion so swift, so sweet; a love like the rose-bud which hangs half-closed over the door in the dawn; which is wide-flung to the sun at noon; which scatters its petals at dusk.

The rose!

She has filled your days with the memory of her fragrance; her leaves still scent the night from out the sealed crystal vase which is your heart.

But an' you would attain the priceless boon of peace, see to it that a humdrum bulb be planted in the brown flower-pot which is your home.

And because of this God-given love of youth which was causing her heart to thud and the blood to race through her veins, she did not withdraw her hands when he held and kissed them and pressed his forehead upon them.

"Lotus-flower," he whispered so that she could scarcely hear. "Bud of innocence! ivory tower of womanhood! temple of love! Beloved, beloved, I am at thy feet." And he knelt and kissed the little feet in the heelless little slippers; then, rising, took both her hands and led her to the door; and his eyes were filled with a great sadness, in spite of the joy which sang in his heart as he took her into the shelter of his arms.

"I love thee too well," he said, as he bent and kissed the riotous curls so near his mouth. "Yes, I love thee too well to snatch thee even as a hungry dog snatches his food, though, verily, I be more near to starving than any hungry dog. What dost thou know of love, of life, in the strange countries of the East? For thy life will

"I have owned a hundred women!"

he answered defiantly.

The girl recoiled as from a blow. Was this man who paraded his conquests before her the same one who had feasted so freely on her lips that moonlit night in Grand Canary?

She was his prisoner now. He had stolen her and brought her to his stronghold in the desert. Her father was also a captive. Pansy Langham's life had crashed in ruins about her. What good were her millions now? The mask had been removed. Raoul LeBreton was the Sultan Casim El Ammeh!—a Mohammedan!

And yet she wanted no man's kisses but his. Love for him consumed her, but race and religion stood between them.

Little did she guess that the Arab had foreseen this minute, that he had trailed her father, Sir George for fifteen years. The Englishman, a captain at the time, had killed his father. Casim El Ammeh had not forgotten. Revenge was his at last!

He had intended having his way with her and then selling her as a slave—a fate more cruel than a white man could conceive. But love—an emotion an Arab scoffs at—had come to thwart him. Was he to forego his oath of an eye for an eye, or open the doors of his harem and seek forgetfulness?

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They Were Alone . . . .

The magic of the desert night had closed about them. Cairo, friends,—civilization as she knew it—were left far behind. She, an unbeliever, was in the heart of the trackless wastes with a man whose word was more than law.

And yet, he was her slave!

"I shall ask nothing of you until you shall love me," he promised. "You shall draw your curtains, and until you call, you shall go undisturbed."

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